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#11

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UP FRONT

By now you've no doubt figured out that the exciting surprise announcement I promised to make about COMICS INTERVIEW this month is heralded by the banner across the cover: *We're increasing the number of pages in the magazine!*

More pages means more interviews, more art, and more of the high-quality photos you've come to expect from INTERVIEW. We've always said we needed more space — and that with the help of readers and advertisers, we'd grow. Now, thanks to the support of comics fandom, we're doing it.

The added pages will allow us to cover some of the areas that deserve more attention — such as Production, Merchandising, Publishing and the Independents — as well as affording space to go more in-depth with some of our interviews.

Although, as I've already started to suspect, adding 16 more pages every issue isn't quite enough to contain a growing magazine such as COMICS INTERVIEW — even *with* the extra space, we're still bursting at the seams with more ideas and interviews than we can squeeze in each month!

But who knows — if things keep going well, maybe the magazine will continue to grow, and one day we'll be able to fit *all* those far-ranging feature-interview departments I talked about in #1 into each and every issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.

We're well on our way, and here's a hale-and-hearty thanks to all of you who helped make it happen!

-DAVID

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Ramon & Shawnee

"Many writers would almost kill to get the chance I got in Hollywood."

Piecing it all together.

DOUG MOENCH

VITAL STATISTICS

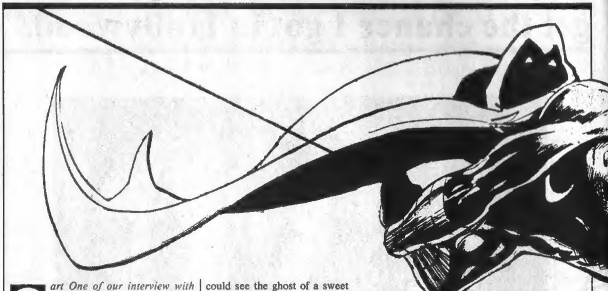
Name: Doug Moench
Residence: Bucks County, PA
Occupation: Writer
Credits: WEIRDWORLD, THE HULK, MASTER OF KUNG FU, MOON KNIGHT, ARION, BATMAN, OMEGA MEN, KA-ZAR, DOC SAVAGE, THOR, FANTASTIC FOUR, et al
Favorite Time of Day to Write: The most *productive* time begins one minute after the first six hours I've been at it. It takes that long for the brain chemistry to be altered by concentration, I think, and that's when the mind shifts into high gear, suddenly streaking along on some kind of naturally-produced amphetamine.

My *favorite* time to write — now that I live in the country and I'm able to see the sun rise and set as well as all the trees and clouds and birds and rabbits right outside the window — is during the day. When I lived in a matchbox cavern in Manhattan, tucked in the center of a building where every view was a brick wall, my life was very nearly timeless, gauged by a meaningless clock rather than the reality of the sun, and it didn't *matter* when I wrote or slept. Over a period of months, I kept working a little later and a little later during each 24 hour cycle until I found myself knocking off for bed at ten in the morning and waking up to start work at six in the evening. I loathed those hours — but I loved the act of writing within those hours, if that makes any sense. Now — given my druthers — my favorite work time is during the day, although it seems my best writing is still done late at night.

Like Aztec Ace, time and me produce friction. I don't get along well with time. I like to pretend I'm normal . . . but writers are anything but.

DOUG MOENCH

"When I quit Marvel I felt like I'd just



Part One of our interview with Doug Moench was a "First Look" at his new series for Eclipse, AZTEC ACE. (See COMICS INTERVIEW #10.) In Part Two, Doug covers the spectrum of his career — from writing for men's magazines, to his latest projects for Epic (SIX FROM SIRIUS) and DC (BATMAN, THE OMEGA MEN, and DETECTIVE COMICS) — while sharing with interviewer Bob Greenberger a generous serving of pungent Moenchian opinions on the mad world of Hollywood, "adult" comics, Marvel, the lionization and subsequent pillorying of Frank Miller and Don McGregor, and why LOVE AND ROCKETS is similar to FAMILY FEUD . . .

BOB GREENBERGER: *Besides AZTEC ACE, you have SIX FROM SIRIUS coming out. It's going to seem like you're suddenly very prolific.*

DOUG MOENCH: Not only ACE and SIX FROM SIRIUS, but I also hope to finally get my new DC series going in '84. But I'm no more prolific right now than I've been for the last seven or eight years. I was, in fact, vastly more prolific in the early and mid-Seventies when I averaged some seventy pages a week and when it was not unusual for me to do more than a hundred pages a week — not at all unusual for me to do more than a hundred pages in a single week. I remember **John Verpoorten** passing out the paychecks each Friday. He was a great big bear of a man with a gruff facade that was largely phony. He'd get to my paycheck, look at the amount, and hand it over shaking his head with a deep down-from-under look, but if you looked back hard enough you could see the ghost of a sweet smile in there. Deb and I had some good times with John. We'd go over to his place on Friday night and Deb would make pizza and popcorn in his kitchen and John would show us a double-feature from his collection of movies — GUNGA DIN and THE FRENCH CONNECTION, BULLITT and IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE — great movies and a real treat since this was back in the days before home video. The fact that I now own close to three-hundred movies myself, on laserdisc and tape, is somehow less exciting than those nights when John would roll out the old projector and slap on a reel. And during popcorn breaks John would good-naturedly sass me about how much work I was doing and how much money I was making. Then, because I was dependable on deadlines, he'd ask me if I wanted to take on *another* book. But actually, in today's terms, I wasn't making *that* much money. I can earn more than the same amount now by doing less than half the work. But I certainly *was* prolific. If I'd been getting today's rates and royalties back then, I'd own Luxembourg right now. But what does it all mean anyway? Right now, talking about it, the only thing I feel is a sense of loss over Big **John Verpoorten**.

BOB: *Then you're not doing more work now?*

DOUG: When I quit Marvel in November of '82 I had six very solid ideas for new series and I wanted to get all six started *immediately.* When I was a kid in Chicago my family used to go up to the north woods of Wisconsin for a vacation every summer. We'd put a bunch of nuts in a small-necked bottle and watch the chipmunks crawl into the bottle to get them. They'd stuff so many nuts into their cheek-pouches that they couldn't fit their heads back out through the neck of the bottle. It was simple greed. And I'm the same way with my ideas. I suppose I can comfortably wriggle out of the milk bottle with only four of the six nuts in my cheeks, but I desperately want to get all six of them out into the open. Anyway, what actually happened was even less than that as things weirdly turned out. In the three or four days after I quit Marvel I was on the phone almost constantly — it seemed like it would never stop ringing — discussing plans to get these projects going. I felt like I'd just come out from under a very dense shadow, into the fresh air, and I was just busting with ideas.

BOB: *You mentioned this to me.*

DOUG: Yeah. You see, I had — and still have — this feeling that it's probably best to do nothing but my own creations from now on. I mean, if there's no shortage of ideas, why not? I've written a good number of my own creations in the past — from WEIRDWORLD and MOON KNIGHT all the way back to four or five different series at Warren — but I've also paid my dues on an incredible number of series established by someone else. If I haven't yet earned the right to concentrate on my own stuff, when will I? This, of course, doesn't mean that I'll *never* write a previously established series. That would be a foolish position to take in this business. And besides, there are too many established characters I've loved and dreamed of writing ever since I was a kid. Besides The Batman, Hawkman springs immediately to mind. But anyway, I wanted to at least

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come out from under a dense shadow."

Moon Knight as drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz.

try nothing but my own stuff for a while and see what would happen. So there I was in the midst of setting these things up and bang, the phone rings again. I'd just finished talking to **Dick Giordano** and **Dean Mullaney**. Who could it be now? And I swear to God the woman's voice actually said: "This is Hollywood calling." **Ralph Bakshi** came on the line and threw a wonderful monkey wrench into all my plans by asking me to write a screenplay for his first live-action film to be produced by **Dino De Laurentiis.**

BOB: *Was that the RED SONJA film?*

DOUG: Yes, and after that, another screenplay to be co-written with Ralph. Now, when the offer was made, I actually said no. I told Ralph, with whom I'd never spoken before, that the only things I could imagine that would be more frustrating than writing comics would be writing movies and TV. But, just as I love comics and consider the inevitable frustration worth it in the end, so too do I love movies — and during the second phone call I said yes, I would very much like to try it. You see, being such a fanatic about movies, I've read a lot about them and even before I got out there I pretty much knew what Hollywood would be like. And I'd even had previous Hollywood experience, in a minor way and only over the phone, when some independent producers wanted to make a film based on an article I'd written for OUI magazine. **Roy Thomas** and **Gerry Conway** were involved in that deal — which is still up in the air right now — and Roy's experiences with other Hollywood deals, by the way, only confirmed everything I've ever read about the business.

But on the other hand, after Ralph's first call, after I'd said no, and then maybe I started thinking "How can I turn this down? What's the matter with me? Am I crazy?" I knew I'd spend the rest of my life wondering if I'd ever get another offer like that — and wondering what might have happened if I'd said yes. So I did say yes to the second call, and the experience turned out to be everything I'd hoped, feared and expected. And as a result, all my new plans for comics were set back more than a year — when all I'd really wanted to do was explode immediately after leaving Marvel, strut my stuff and show what I was capable of doing if set loose.

Jim Steranko, by the way, was the instigator behind my entire Hollywood trip. He's the one who recommended me to Ralph. Obviously, after reading through the current crop of writers — and checking me out through second, third and fourth opinions — Ralph agreed with **Steranko's** assessment. But it is **Steranko** who was initially responsible, and I have him to thank for everything, good, bad, and indifferent.

BOB: *What was it like in Hollywood?*

DOUG: Don't get me wrong — as maddening as it was, it was also exhilarating. I wasn't being sarcastic — I really am grateful to **Steranko.** If you know anything about Hollywood, you know there are literally thousands of writers out there who spend their entire lives trying to get the chance I got. Many of them would come very close to killing for it. And here it was out of the blue, handed to me on a silver platter. I called no one. I knocked on no doors. I sent no resumes or samples of my work. They came to *me.* And **Steranko** saw to that. **Ralph Bakshi,** who has subsequently become a very good friend, is the one who's doing it for me now — if anything else is to be done — but it was **Steranko** who began it all. As for what the experience was like . . . well, Hollywood is a city of illusion — even the air isn't real. A very weird place. I must've spent some ten weeks of last year out there and never once did I feel like I was actually *outside.* The whole area feels like it's canned indoors, and it's more than the fact that it was ninety degrees in January. It's really a little side-pocket of the Twilight Zone. I don't know if I could've taken it without a fellow traveler like **Ralph Bakshi** to howl at my side every step of the strange way. He's *very* Brooklyn and that was a godsend. The work itself was unreal, too — exhilarating and depressing and anxious and exciting all at the same time on next to no sleep, making it ultimately exasperating at best. How does one reconcile having a bleary-eyed solo meal in some wretched spoon at three in the morning (because it's the only place in all of Los Angeles open at that time), then going back to the hotel to write ten more pages of screenplay — with sipping cappucino in **Dino De Laurentiis'** private bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel only a few hours later. There was so much pressure, and the work was so tough, that I think I almost literally sleep-walked through most of the experience. I never caught my breath. I'm only realizing

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666 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10103

Dick Giordano/Vice President-Executive Editor

Dear Reader,

Last summer when we released Sampler #1, I asked you what you thought about it and said that if the response warranted it, we would do more.

Should have kept my mouth shut!
After digging from under the mountain of mail, we decided that we'd have another go at it and-- TA-DA!-- Sampler #2 will be in your comic store even as you read this. Check it out, and make yourself a promise -- that you'll at least look at one of the books we highlight in it.

There are so many things I want to say about DC Comics. And we're very excited about so many of those books ... from JEMM, SON OF SATURN (our latest maxi-series) to the new look for JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA to the new formats on THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES and THE NEW TEEN TITANS.

That's why we came up with the idea of the DC SAMPLER. It gives everyone a chance to get a feel for what we're publishing. That's important, because here in the offices, folks like Len Wein and Karen Berger and Marv Wolfman and Alan Gold and Ross Andru are always talking about how they like one particular book or another -- but how they sometimes have the feeling that no fans are picking up on the change in writer, or in artist, or in creative direction. Like THE SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING. Or VIGILANTE.

Besides, we know you like free specials and giveaways.

Dick.
Dick

P.S. Oh, yeah ... Sampler #3 is on the drawing board for later in 84'!
Who else loves ya, baby?

DOUG MOENCH

"It hurt to walk away from MOON KNIGHT."

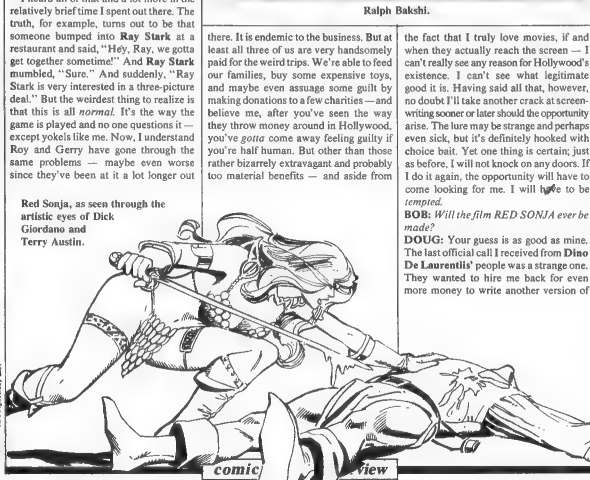
now how exciting it was to be working in an office on the Paramount lot, passing through those famous gates every morning in the rental car, being taken care of by the thousand dollars a week expense money, flying back and forth in the first class section with the complimentary champagne and the fresh copy of the NEW YORK TIMES. Wow. Hotshop stuff, right? Well, *maybe*. But, you see, truth itself is a very rare commodity out there. Hype and bluster and exaggeration is the name of the game. We'll make millions on this. We're gonna shoot the film in 3-D. **Brooke Shields** will play Red Sonja. Your next screenplay is gonna star **Roy Scheider, Gene Hackman** and **Al Pacino. Bo Derek** will play Red Sonja. You'll be living out here in a mansion within six months. **Ornella Muti** will play Red Sonja. ABC is very interested in doing this series and you're gonna write it for $35,000 an episode plus $2,000 a week just to serve as the story editor. Come meet this PENTHOUSE Pet we just flew in from Hawaii; she will play Red Sonja. **Ray Stark** is very interested in doing a three-picture deal with us.

I heard all of that and a lot more in the relatively brief time I spent out there. The truth, for example, turns out to be that someone bumped into **Ray Stark** at a restaurant and said, "Hey, Ray, we gotta get together sometime!" And **Ray Stark** mumbled, "Sure." And suddenly, "Ray Stark is very interested in a three-picture deal." But the weirdest thing to realize is that this is all *normal*. It's the way the game is played and no one questions it — except yokels like me. Now, I understand Roy and Gerry have gone through the same problems — maybe even worse since they've been at it a lot longer out there. It is endemic to the business. But at least all three of us are very handsomely paid for the weird trips. We're able to feed our families, buy some expensive toys, and maybe even assuage some guilt by making donations to a few charities — and believe me, after you've seen the way they throw money around in Hollywood, you've *gotta* come away feeling guilty if you're half human. But other than those rather bizarrely extravagant and probably too material benefits — and aside from the fact that I truly love movies, if and when they actually reach the screen — I can't really see any reason for Hollywood's existence. I can't see what legitimate good it is. Having said all that, however, no doubt I'll take another crack at screen-writing sooner or later should the opportunity arise. The lure may be strange and perhaps even sick, but it's definitely hooked with choice bait. Yet one thing is certain; just as before, I will not knock on any doors. If I do it again, the opportunity will have to come looking for me. I will have to be *tempted*.

Ralph Bakshi.

BOB: *Will the film RED SONJA ever be made?*

DOUG: Your guess is as good as mine. The last official call I received from **Dino De Laurentiis'** people was a strange one. They wanted to hire me back for even more money to write another version of



Red Sonja, as seen through the artistic eyes of Dick Giordano and Terry Austin.

© 1982 Conan Properties, Inc.

"SIX FROM SIRIUS was a labor of love."

the screenplay, but with the stipulation that someone else be cut out of the deal. In effect, they offered me money to stab someone in the back. When I said no, they came back with the assurance that this other person wouldn't be *completely* cut out of the deal — just out of having any input in the screenplay. It sounded suspicious to me, but I told them I'd have to think about it. They said fine, get back to us by July 20th. Within an hour of hanging up, I'd already decided I wouldn't get back to them and that's where it stands. It could be they've gotten someone else to write a completely new screenplay. And it could be that someone else has changed parts of mine, in which case I'll get partial screen credit. And it could even be that my screenplay will get filmed, but I doubt it. If they wanted to film what I did, why would they try to hire me back to work on it some more? Anyway, I've gotten a future AZTEC ACE story out of the whole thing. It'll be called "The Lure of Zeroes" and the title has a double — no, triple — meaning. On one level it'll be about Japanese kamikaze pilots in their World War II Zero planes. On another level, it'll be about the lure of a lot of zeroes in a row after a prime number — a huge figure representing a sum of money. And on a third level, it'll deal with why both of those lures — the lure of a suicide plunge in the name of the emperor and the flag, and the lure of money — both add up to a lot of zeroes, to zip, nothing.

BOB: *We haven't really talked about SIX FROM SIRIUS. It's been kicking around for a while. How did it come about?*

DOUG: **Paul Gulacy** and I meshed well as a team on MASTER OF KUNG FU and on the few other things we've done for Warren and EPIC, and we've become friends as well as collaborators of preference. Even before Hollywood called me, Paul faced his own temptation in the big bucks of the advertising business, and it had virtually removed him from comics. But telling a twenty-second "story" about hair cream on a single storyboard is not the godhead of creativity. What it boiled down to was that Paul still loves comics and — money aside — he likes to do them for the sheer fun of it. So one time when he came out to the house for a weekend a couple years back, he proposed doing something together again. I said fine. I like Paul's storytelling as much or more than his actual drawing, which ain't nothing to sneeze at. He does probably the cleanest, crispest, sharpest stuff around right now. I naturally figured working with him again would be a treat, so we hashed out some science fiction ideas — maybe a dozen or more, including variations — and after a long, long time we came up with SIX FROM SIRIUS.

BOB: *This thing is going to be over a hundred pages, isn't it?*

DOUG: It clocks in at exactly 120 pages. An epic indeed. It felt almost like doing a novel. And more than a screenplay, although the effort was spread across a much longer period of time. Years. But there were other reasons for the length of time. Paul still took on choice advertising assignments when they came his way. SIX FROM SIRIUS was literally a labor of love — our "off-time" hobby for the past couple of years. Which is why it was conceived the way it was — as a no-deadline project, to be done whenever there was free time to do it.

BOB: *And now it's evolved into an Epic Comic series of its own?*

DOUG: Well, into a limited series of four monthly issues, each containing roughly thirty pages of material. The four issues will be similar to the Epic Comics Baxter books, but SIX FROM SIRIUS will be printed on slick, coated cover-stock throughout. I could be wrong, but I think that's a first. The first issue will probably come out in May and the last one in August. There is a possibility, however, of doing at least one other story using the same characters and milieu.

BOB: *Could you tell us a little about the first story?*

DOUG: Well, Sirius is, of course, a star system, and the series involves six semi-freelance agents sent from Sirius Hub, a world-spanning complex of interconnected

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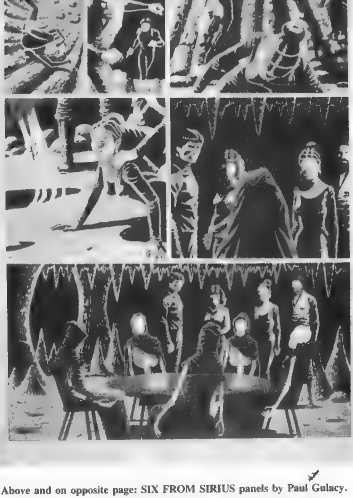
"All I wanted to do was strut my stuff."

natural and artificial worlds, to intervene in a dispute between two "superpower" planets named Axellon and Balsamo. As a springboard, I thought of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early Sixties, with Axellon and Balsamo roughly corresponding to the United States and the Soviet Union. Axellon has a moon called Heavenstone which corresponds with Cuba and on which Balsamo has been installing Particle Beam Weapons, as well as something else far more awesome which I don't want to give away. The parallels to earthly politics stop there, however — there is no good-guy/bad-guy mentality — and the rest of the story involves "scientific mysticism," disillusionment, betrayal, heroism, and even the difference between body and mind, body and spirit. A major character is Phaedra, who is not one of the six. She's the Ambassador and Peace Negotiator from Balsamo and she has latent ESPer abilities. There's a *lot* of action — Paul's specialty — and it basically involves a race against time. But it's an inverted race against time. Instead of having to reach some place before a certain deadline, Jakosa Lone and his crew must rescue Phaedra and keep her alive and well — while being hunted down — until the scheduled Peace Negotiations take place on Heavenstone itself. By the end, however, very little turns out to be what it has all seemed. In fact, there are probably more plot twists in this story than in anything else I've ever done . . . at least until my new DC series gets going, a series which is literally *based* on plot twists and what such wrenching revlations can do to the mind and spirit of a man who simply wants to be left alone.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. To sum up SIX FROM SIRIUS without giving too much away, I would say it's solid action science fiction. If you can accept a scientific basis for ESP, then it might even qualify as "pure" science fiction. In fact, **Laurie Sutton** paid me a high compliment indeed when she said it's *real* science fiction, rather than the usual type of comics science fiction which tends to evolve into super-heroes in space.

BOB: *How did the story change from a series in EPIC magazine to a limited series title in its own right?*

DOUG: I don't really know. Perhaps because it got so long. I did hear something about someone from marketing finally getting a look at these hundred-plus pages spilling out of one of Archie's drawers. Supposedly he or she was extremely impressed and proposed giving the story its own title. I can believe it, because Paul's pages are gorgeous.



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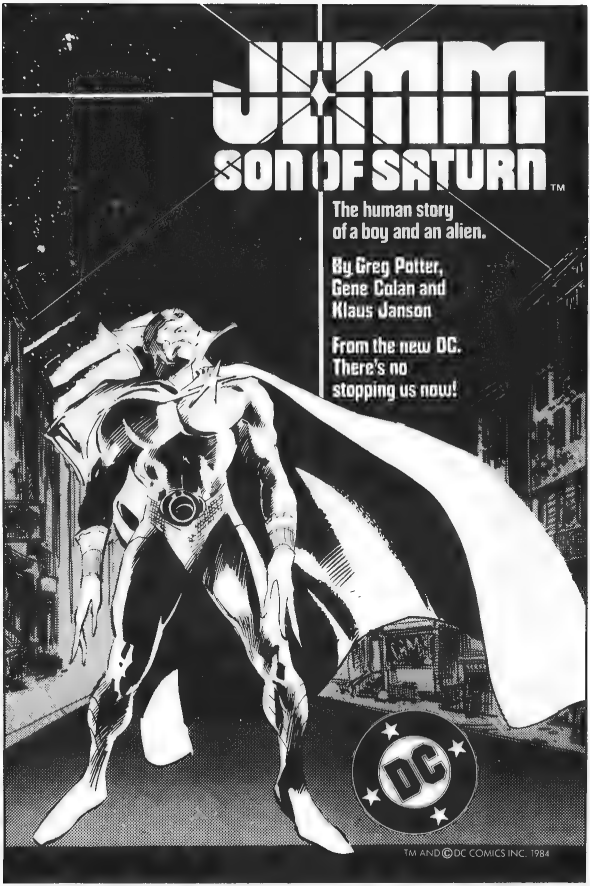
Above and on opposite page: SIX FROM SIRIUS panels by **Paul Gulacy.**

BOB: *As far as your regular comics work goes, except for AZTEC ACE you write pretty much for DC only?*

DOUG: And a largely refreshing experience it is. I've been very impressed with both **Dick Giordano** and **Jenette Kahn**. Most of the other people over there I've known for years, of course. It reminds me of the time **Jim Shooter** astounded an office full of people by saying he had to admit that the DC writing staff was now better than the Marvel writing staff. The reply to that, obviously, is that the DC staff *is* the Marvel writing staff, or at least it once was.

Anyway, Dick was great when I came over to DC, and I'm really sorry it's taking me so long to pay him back — although the fault is now in the usual contract hassles more than anything else, and I should be able to start my new series for them very soon. You'll remember I said I wanted to concentrate on my own stuff when I left Marvel. This is all well and fine, but even under the best of conditions it takes time to get new projects rolling, while the mortgage is still due every month, not to mention the phone, heating and electric bills. So in the meantime, DC offered me regular work on as many established titles as I needed. I asked for three books and they made an offer which couldn't possibly have been better: BATMAN, WORLD'S FINEST, and DETECTIVE. The Batman is my favorite DC character. However, as I've explained, Hollywood yanked virtually a year out of my career, during which I had no real time to develop my new ideas —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"ARION is a bit of a sore spot with me."

and as a result I've ended up staying on the Batman books a lot longer than anyone anticipated. It's even reached the point where **Lea Wein** now wants me to stay on the books indefinitely. But I really don't think my Batman work has been as good as it could or should be — with several exceptions, one being my recent prize-fighting story — and the reason is that I've never actually made a long-range commitment to the character. I keep thinking I'm going to get off the book soon, and consequently I don't want to shake things up too much, fearing I'll only cause difficulties for the next writer. Now that doesn't mean I'm not *trying* to do my best with Batman; it simply means that I'm only able to try to do my best within self-imposed limitations.

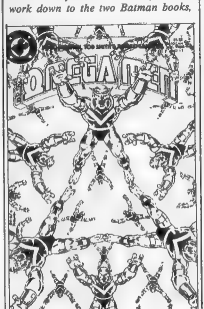
BOB: *And when you first went to DC they gave you the Batman books and asked you to "save" ARION, or make it make sense, anyway.*

DOUG: I didn't say that.

BOB: *No, but I'm saying that.*

DOUG: Okay, it's supposed to be a country of free speech, Bob. But **ARION** is just a little bit of a sore spot with me. When **Ernie Colon** offered it to me I hadn't yet read it. I didn't know that **Paul Kupperberg** was laying a claim to its co-creation, and I got stuck in the middle of a dispute. The last thing I wanted to do was set a precedent in taking over an established series whose creation had been credited to someone else, and that's the main reason I finally left it — that and time.

BOB: *Now you've winnowed your DC work down to the two Batman books,*



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and you're about to pick up the OMEGA MEN.

DOUG: I've already started OMEGA MEN — three plots, one for the annual, and one script completed so far — but I'd hardly call three monthly books a "winnowed" workload. In fact I told Marv that I couldn't accept OMEGA MEN on an indefinite basis. Once my contract for the new DC series is finalized, I will step down from DETECTIVE and BATMAN, but I still want to start up one more of my *other* new ideas, hopefully also for DC if a few points can be worked out. See, even if SIX FROM SIRIUS does go on to other stories, it will appear in a limited and irregular fashion at best. Paul simply can't handle a regular series at this time, not with the possibility of very lucrative advertising work always looming around the corner. So SIX FROM SIRIUS, considered as regular work, will never amount to more than half an entity, if that. That leaves me with AZTEC ACE, the forthcoming DC series, and one more yet to be developed, plus occasional one-shot graphic novels and so forth. My goal is three to four monthly titles of my own creation. If I can handle OMEGA MEN on top of that, I will, because I think it could be a lot of fun, and the characters certainly have a lot of potential. Marv's reply was: "If I can get only six good issues out of you, at least that's six good issues." And a reply like that is just one more reason why I'm happy with the people at DC.

BOB: *What are you looking to do with the OMEGA MEN?*

DOUG: I hate this question.

BOB: *Sorry.*

DOUG: Any reply I could make would tend to cast aspersion on the previous writer, and I don't want to do that. Let me give you an example. I quit Marvel when I was directly ordered to kill off all the characters in the MASTER OF KUNG FU book, and when it looked like the killing would not end there. It hurts — it hurt a *lot* — to walk away from WEIRD-WORLD and MOON KNIGHT, two series I had created and was now forced to orphan, to leave behind inthe care of people who seemed cold and very possibly unworthy of trust. **Denny O'Neil** started searching for writers to carry on MOON KNIGHT. One such writer called me up and said, "**Denny O'Neil** has asked me to write MOON KNIGHT, but I told him **Doug Moench** created that book and I won't write it unless Doug gives his approval. That's why I'm calling you, Doug, to ask if you mind." I told this writer that I would prefer a situation in which *nobody* writes MOON KNIGHT, but what am I going to do? *Somebody's* going to write it, and if you need the work, it might as well be you. The best I could do would be to never again look at the book. So this writer says great and proceeds to write at least one story for the book. I have no idea if he is the present writer. Anyway, a few months later some fanzine comes in the mail and here's this *very same writer* going on about all the "necessary changes" he's going to make in the MOON KNIGHT series — changes which, as far as I could tell from the fanzine, amounted to guest-starring the Fantastic Four and the X-Men. So here's a guy who

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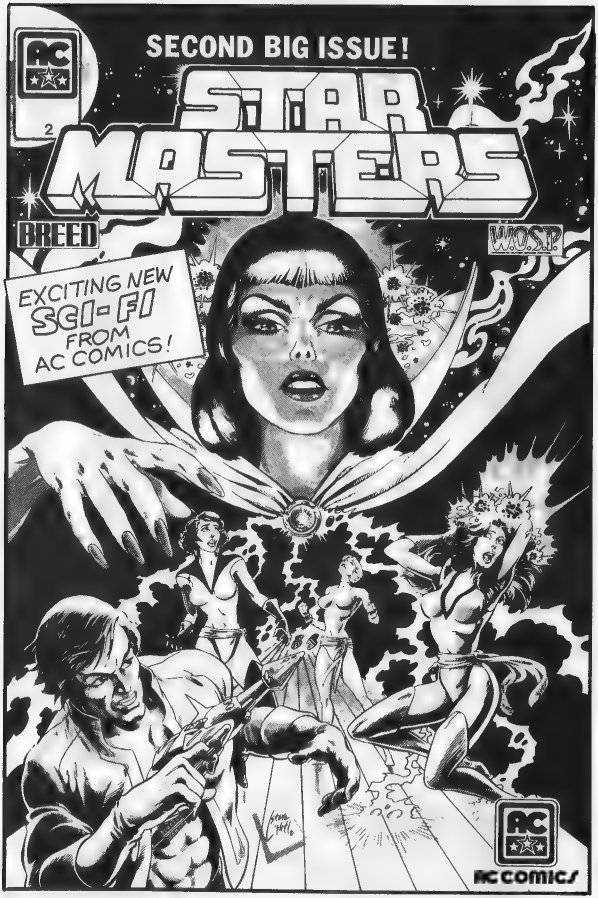
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"Writing for DC is largely refreshing."

seemed to bend over backwards in a gracious attempt *not* to offend me — but as soon as he starts writing the book he's saying things which make my ears burn. It's similar to Marvel claiming at conventions that **Chris Claremont** created the "new" X-Men when the truth is that **Len Wein** and **Dave Cockrum** created the new X-Men. I doubt if Chris himself ever made the claim, but Len's and Dave's ears burn.

So when I hear you ask me "How am I going to change OMEGA MEN?" and I say, "Well, one of the things I'd like to do is make some of the characters more sympathetic," it sounds like I'm saying, "Geez, **Roger Slifer** did a terrible job on those characters." So let's just say I hope to make it a fast-paced, fun, somewhat thought-provoking book.

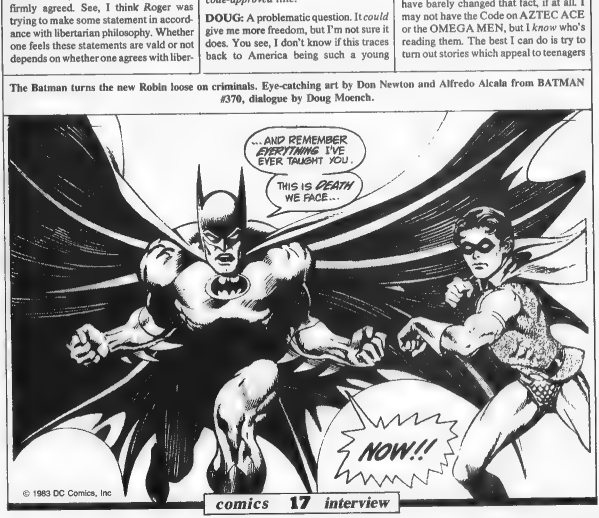
BOB: *Okay. Marv has been quoted in some DC press releases as saying the book will take on a "more optimistic tone." Was that based on his conversations with you, or was that his idea as editor?*

DOUG: No, that was mine, but Marv firmly agreed. See, I think Roger was trying to make some statement in accordance with libertarian philosophy. Whether one feels these statements are valid or not depends on whether one agrees with libertarian thinking. However, Roger did have some serious points to make. The fact that I don't agree with some of these points dictates changes wrought by my hand. He admitted he was doing a team book without believing in the efficacy of teams. By extension, this means a lack of faith in cooperation. The only character who ever seemed to accomplish anything was Tigorr, and nearly everything he accomplished was through savagery. To me, that makes a very emphatic point. I do not believe in the point, however, and thereofore the book will be handled *differently*. I'm not saying *better*, although that's obviously what I hope *for*, and I'm not even going to say that the changes I plan to make will be "necessary changes". The difference will simply be the difference between me and **Roger Slifer**, and the reader can make his own preference.

BOB: *You'll be writing OMEGA MEN for the direct-sales market only. Do you think this will give you more freedom to do the kinds of things you can't do in a code-approved title?*

DOUG: A problematic question. It *could* give me more freedom, but I'm not sure it does. You see, I don't know if this traces back to America being such a young country and therefore culturally insecure, but for whatever reasons comic books carry the stigma of kids' stuff here in America while they are considered a legitimate, adult medium in Europe and Japan. So in direct sales, yes, you can make a book more "adult" — *if* you don't sell it to kids. I don't want to get into a discussion about some weird rating system either, all that's needed is "Adults Only" printed on the cover. However, I doubt if OMEGA MEN is the type of book which significantly appeals to adults more than teenagers and kids. In fact, I doubt if there's *any* American comic — with the possible exception of **Pekar's** AMERICAN SPLENDOR — which falls into that category. And the fact that no comic since the undergrounds has carried an "Adults Only" label indicates to me that the publishers *know* this to be the case. It's like the "Adults Only" stalk-and-slash horror films which are seen almost exclusively by kids. It's a sham. The market for comics in this country is primarily kids and teenagers and the direct sales shops have barely changed that fact, if at all. I may not have the Code on AZTEC ACE or the OMEGA MEN, but I *know* who's reading them. The best I can do is try to turn out stories which appeal to teenagers

The Batman turns the new Robin loose on criminals. Eye-catching art by Don Newton and Alfredo Alcala from BATMAN #370, dialogue by Doug Moench.



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"I love comics, and consider the inevit-

and adults, something which does not really seem so very hard to do. Adults don't *demand* blood and tits. On the other hand,I want to make it clear that I won't be writing "kiddie books." I tried that with SHOGUN WARRIORS and GODZILLA and I got crucified.

BOB: *Well, fortunately, you're going into these projects with the reputation of being one of the more adult-oriented writers doing stories which try to say something beyond the usual slam-bang.*

DOUG: Yeah. To take an example from movies, I'm one of the few who saw ROAD WARRIOR — bought the movie on laserdisc, in fact — and felt it was grievously lacking in story. It was fun and it moved like a son of a bitch — a stunt man's wetdream and I like stunts as much as anyone, but unless they occur legitimately within the context of the story and involve characters about whom I care, then the stunts become nothing more than technical exercise in ball-busting bombastics. If a film is nothing *but* action, the action swiftly becomes meaningless on every level other than the purely kinetic. It becomes a pinball game, not a movie or a story. I'm a firm believer that contrast is the key in everything from the texture of food to thepeaks and valleys in melodrama. Take the **Led Zeppelin** song "Stairway to Heaven." Everyone thinks of it as an exemplar of heavy metal rock 'n roll, but the impression is an illusion. The group's less memorable songs *are* super heavy metal, which is precisely why they' re less memorable. If you listen to "Stairway to Heaven" you'll find that three-quarters of it is a very subdued and even lovely melody — and *then* it builds to an extremely powerful crescendo, whose power is amplified all the more by the contrast. If the song *began* at that level, the power would be instantly lost; it would be just another loudly droning and buzzing mess of noise. Without sickness, you don't appreciate health. Without hunger, food is tasteless. So the endless non-stop action of something like ROAD WARRIOR doesn't quite make it with me. The action ultimately numbs me. I've had no opportunity to get to know these people, to love or hate them. Why should I be happy or sad when they're bounced fivehundred years through the air by some souped-up car? I can appreciate the kinetics for what they are, but they lack the effect they would have had if they'd followed at least a modicum of characterization. Women seem to understand this principle of contrast very well, particularly in sex. In a general sense, they respond to love stories more than they do to porn. And in a specific sense, they tend to prefer a process of gentleness *building* to a climax, and it makes perfect sense. If you start out rough, you got nowhere to go.

BOB: *I understand. Now, you came onto the Batman books just as they were introducing the Jason Todd character and preparing to turn him into the new Robin. Did you find this a creative challenge?*

DOUG: And a half.

BOB: *I'm told it was suggested by Mike Uslan —*

DOUG: Was it? I thought it was something cooked up between Gerry, Len, and presumably Dick.

BOB: *I'm told Mike suggested it to Len so that when the Batman movie finally comes out the comic will conform to it.*

DOUG: Possibly. Doing the movie is fine, doing the merchandising is fine, but as far as I'm concerned it goes much farther than that. Batman and Robin go together like bread and butter. But it certainly became a complicated process. Because the original Dick Grayson Robin had become such an integral part of the highly successful TEEN TITANS, it was a situation in which we wanted to have Batman and Robin again but we *couldn't* have Batman and Robin again because we also wanted to have TEEN TITANS. So bringing in another Robin actually wasn't a bad idea. There was a lot of discussion back and forth about giving the new kid a different name and I kept saying no, no, the whole idea is to regain *Batman and Robin,* not Batman and Bluejay or whomever. It's not that I was fighting anyone on this — everyone was in eventual agreement — but there were so many sticklers to overcome and it was difficult to determine what had to go. Dick Grayson ultimately went, and I think it's for the better of both books, even though Marv and I both had certain reservations.

BOB: *Do you like Jason Todd as a character?*

DOUG: Well, he still too new to have very strong feelings about. I mentioned earlier the difficulty about not wanting to

Below and opposite: Merchandising material for Red Sonja.

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able frustration worth it in the end."

do anything too radical since I knew I'd be leaving the book in other hands. Lately, however, I've decided this attitude is simply hurting *my* work and I've opened the stops somewhat, trying to write the Batman books as if I *were* going to handle them forever. There are still self-imposed limitations, and hardly a one-hundred percent **Moench** approach, but at least I'm refusing to merely tread water until the changeover in writers. I'm trying to put *all* the characters through changes now — not just Jason. For example, Batman himself has seemed just a trifle too vicious and demented lately. I'm changing that. In my opinion he should be more heroic and more sympathetic, if no less obsessed with justice, and I'm trying to focus more on Jason's "civilian" identity as well as his Robin persona.

BOB: *Things like putting him in school . . .*

DOUG: Exactly. There are a number of things I have on tap right now. Problems of legal guardianship or adoption — the Child Welfare Board getting on Bruce Wayne's case and trying to take Jason away. Things like that.

BOB: *Right. The problem is he can't just go next door to play because he's in the mansion.*

DOUG: And because he has to sleep *sometime.* It's tough, because I'm trying to do a good solid Batman story at the same time, but then subplots are always tough. A lot has just happened and things are jumping all over the place. On the otherhand, I felt Jason's baptism as Robin dragged on too long, but it was unavoidable because it had to dovetail with Dick Grayson's doings in TEEN TITANS and Marv and George were in the middle of some other storyline. I really wanted Dick Grayson to pass on the mantle of Robin to Jason, but Dick Grayson's actions had been plotted way in advance over in the TEEN TITANS. So everyone had to wait. And I'm not sure I managed the wait all that well; one of the problems was that I never realized how *long* the wait was going to be. Anyway, we all did our best in a tough, convoluted situation — but it *was* one hell of a way to jump onto the Batman books.

"The Batman is my favorite DC character."

BOB: *Will Dick Grayson remain part of the Batman family?*

DOUG: Well, obviously, in the sense that Bruce Wayne is still his closest friend and mentor.

BOB: *But if they go into action together . . . ?*

DOUG: It'll be like a special team-up — Batman, Robin, and Nightwing. Otherwise, Dick Grayson will simply pop over occasionally to chew the fat and reminisce or perhaps ask advice on a current case or whatever, maybe give pointers to protege Jason.

BOB: *Okay. Aside from the Jason Todd aspect, are you enjoying writing the Batman books as one long twice-monthly storyline?*

DOUG: Yeah, but it's gruelling. I sometimes feel like I've got Batman coming out of my ears! But what I really like a lot is the different feeling the interwined series has — very different from a regular monthly book. I try to tie up the main storyline in one, two, or at most three issues, but the subplots just keep loping along, one developing into another and another.

BOB: *Right. You've got this subplot with Alfred and his daughter and Bullock with Commissioner Gordon . . .*

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"Not many writers would admit this . . ."

"I've got a great wife and kid. For someone who never thought he'd become the settled-down type, I'm remarkably content." Doug at home with wife, Deb, and son, Derek.

DOUG: And now I've got Mayor Hill coming back onto the scene — a character I hope to resolve more or less permanently — and Jason's troubles with the Child Welfare Bureau, and Nocturna coming back . . .

BOB: *Aside from comics, at different times in your life you've written magazine articles and the like . . .*

DOUG: Just about everything, now that I've written a screenplay. I even sold my first novel, written when I was about 18, although the publisher folded and never printed it. But I still got the munificent sum of five-hundred dollars for writing the thing. Back in Chicago I worked in the communications room at the combined SUN-TIMES and DAILY NEWS. After a while I began writing feature articles for their Sunday supplement magazine, called MIDWEST — what it's like to write horror comics (including a full-page full-color strip done with my old Chicago buddy **Russ Heath**), violence on the midnight subways, a piece on a local stop-motion animation studio where another friend of mine worked, things like that. **Bob Greene** congratulated me on the subway piece, saying it was the scariest thing he'd ever read, and it was supposedly up for a Chicago Journalism Award, but I left for New York before learning the results.

I also did a lot of prose fiction for slick men's magazines like ADAM, KNIGHT, SWINGLE, MAN TO MAN, and so forth — "hippie sex-humor" short stories, very softcore and a lot more "romantic" and humorous than most of the stories in stroke-books like that. I also did a bunch of books, film, and record reviews — and I even wrote pin-up copy and fumettis for FLING magazine. That's the one with the heavy emphasis on absolutely gigantic boobs. I used to call the models "Midnight Cows." Some of the pin-up copy had to be written in the first person, so I would make up some name and guess the measurements as best I could from the photos and write stuff like. "Hi, I'm Cheryl, and you see this lollipop between my breasts? I'm going to lick it all day . . ." Not many writers would admit these things, you know. Then I've written a couple of dramatic radio shows and narrative records for **Dick Giordano** and **Neal Adams** over at Continuity when they were doing the PETER PAN records. And right now I've got two novels in varying stages of completion — both much better than the first one I sold, although it's anyone's guess as to whether I'll ever finish them. I contacted an agent and she was excited, said she could sell them both. But I'd rather finish them first. Short of best-sellers, I'd probably end up getting a lot less money for them than I do for equivalent time spent doing comics, so they're definitely labors of love to be done for their own sakes in leisure time. Were I to sign contracts now, I'd have to finish them on deadline.

BOB: *Well, it sounds like you're very creatively happy . . .*

DOUG: Oh, it's great now! Getting out on my own was the best and smartest thing I've ever done.

BOB: *What should the readers of COMICS INTERVIEW know about Doug Moench in the future?*

DOUG: You got me. The future is tenuous for all of us. Just ask Aztec Ace. I'm a moody person, but I've been surprisingly cheerful for the last few years, even before I quit Marvel. I started running,

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"I got crucified over SHOGUN WARRIORS."

and those endorphins do wonders fo rthe brain. I've got a great wife and a great kid and even a great dog, although the cats often refuse to get off my lap. For someone who never thought he'd become the settled-down family type, I'm remarkably content.

The hungers I have left involve my work and the state of the world in general. Since I loathe politicians, most of my energies will be focused into the work. One thing that tickles me no end is my pinball machine, courtesy **Dino De Laurentiis** Productions. It's called BIG GAME and it was designed by **Harry Williams** for Stern and it's the biggest sucker ever made for the arcades. The ball *flies* — very fast action, fastest I've ever played. I've been addicted to pinball since I was 8 or 9 years old, tall enough to see over the glass and reach the flipper bottons. Every day life becomes an hour or so of free games.

BOB: *Nothing's bugging you?*

DOUG: Well, something has bugged me for a number of years. As an example of it, there's some guy in one of the other fanzines who recently dismissed **Frank Miller**'s RONIN in an egregiously cavalier manner, writing something to the effect that the double-spreads looked like they were done by a ten-year-old with crayolas. This reminds me of a very big Marvel editor who makes statements such as "**Steve Englehart**'s stories read like Swedish movies" and "**Alex Toth**'s art is like wallpaper." Only a stupefyingly narrow mind of bogglingly shallow perceptions could make such statements. Why must pronouncements and judgements — such as my own preceding sentence — be so sweeping and extreme, not to mention callous and cruel? Why can't our voiced opinions be more measured, tempered, considered? As for **Toth** — I can only repeat that any artist who puts me on the edge of my seat while reading an issue of HOT WHEELS has a lot more on the ball than the editor at Marvel will ever have. And take a look at **Toth**'s piece in **Cat Yronwode**'s BOP magazine — the character literly comes to life and dances off the page. I won't bore you with an exegesis on Toth's masterful spotting of blacks, his superb page and panel compostitions, or any of the other things he does as well or better than any other comics artist who ever lived. If these things are not self-evident to the reader, then for that reader perhaps the work is wallpaper — but must the opioion be stated as if it were true for *everyone* who approaches the work? Can't a critic conceive of the possibility that he is *blind* to certain things? For example, **Jackson Pollock**'s canvases *are* literally wallpaper to me. Where I to hang one in my home, its function would be pure decoration — complementary splashes of color, a true work of art in and of itself. But I'm willing to concede that others may indeed glimpse true artistry in the seemingly slapdish splashes of color.

As for **Frank Miller** . . . well, when he first started out I was utterly mystified by the lack of attention he was accorded. I had fully expected an explosion of fanzine raves about "the new **Steranko**" or "the new **Barry Smith**." And by the time the fanzines *did* "discover" Miller, it seemed to me the work was starting to get just a bit tired — he was starting to repeat himself — and my reaction was *now* you notice? But not only did people finally *notice*, they built him up into a vertitable god of the funnybooks. His lionization was *far* too extreme and lavish, extravagantly out of proportion with the worth of the work itself. I'm not a real close friend of Frank's, but even I began to worry about how his

Gulacy SIX FROM SIRIUS art.

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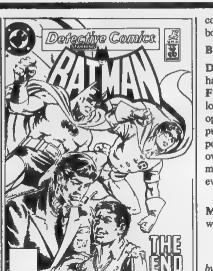
"If you start rough, you got nowhere to go."

head might handle it all. Luckily, my worries were misplaced. But now that he finally *has* struck out in the direction of something relatively new and special, at least in *my* opinion, he's taking a royal dumping. This is insane. Just as he never deserved to be built up so high, he is now torn down with a harshness hardly commensurate with what his work deserves.

Someone who *is* a good friend — **Don McGregor** — constantly receives the same treatment. One month he's god and the next month he's the worst piece of shit floating in the sewer. His work, of course, deserves neither appraisal. It is both commendable for its heartfelt commitment and often flawed in its execution.

On the other hand there are those works which seem to receive unanimously opulent praise without totally deserving it. LOVE AND ROCKETS is a perfect example. Yes, it is certainly refreshing in comparison to the output of DC and Marvel — but FAMILY FEUD is refreshing after an hour of the evening news. That doesn't necessarily elevate it into the rarefied realm of high art. LOVE AND ROCKETS, while fine and admirabe on its own terms, reminds me of little



more than an interesting but highly self-conscious and often muddled middle-period underground. But then, I note that most of the reviews comparing it to the Sistine ceiling are printed by the publisher of the book itself. Hype comes in all colors and every stripe. The point is that both the hype and the abuse is too hysterical.

BOB: *Any closing remarks?*

DOUG: Thank God the comics industry has at least grwon up on the business side. **Frank Miller** and **Jim Starlin** deserve a lot of credit for that, as does DC for opening things up after the independent publishers started showing the way. The possibility of now earning royalties and owning copyrights will change not only my career but the careers of virtually everyone.

And here's a last plug for this guy **Alan Moore.** He's good, and Len was very wise to get him on SWAMP THING.

Doug isn't the only Alan Moore fan—not by a long shot! Already a fan fave in his native England — where he scripts the popular British strips MARVELMAN and V FOR VENDETTA — Alan's writing for DC's SWAMP THING has now made him an overnight star in the USA, too. In response to the great surge of interest in Alan Moore, we're bringing you an exclusive, up-to-the-minute interview with him in the very next issue of COMICS INTERVIEW!

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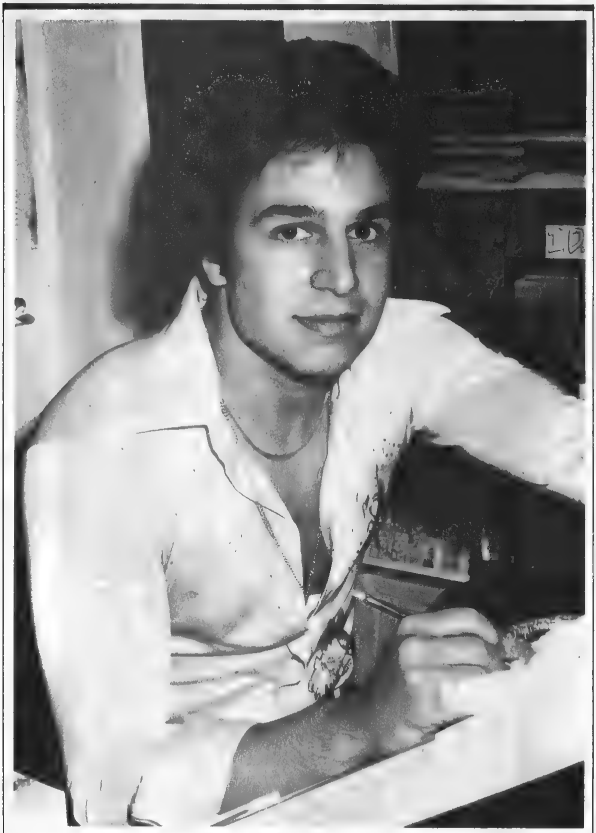

Photo: D. Jon Zimmerman

With THE X-MEN you can go anywhere."

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JOHN ROMITA, JR

His steady but swift rise in comics has taken artist John Romita, Jr. along a high road of top-selling Marvel titles. From penciling IRON MAN in the late Seventies, John went on to draw the best-known Marvel super-hero of all, the Amazing Spider-Man, following after his own artistic heroes, Steve Ditko, John Byrne — and father John Romita, Sr.

Now JR, Jr. has succeeded Paul Smith as penciller of Marvel's top-selling book, THE X-MEN. To learn more about John's life, career and opinions (on such subjects as comic-book violence and artistic egomania), Brian Talley talked to John as he was about to leave Spitley for Wolverine, Storm and the rest of Professor Xavier's malefactor-mauling mutants . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Romita, Jr.
Occupation: Comic-book artist
Born: 17 August 1956 — Brooklyn, NY
Training: Art major in college. Also taught by my father, John Romita, Sr.
Credits: IRON MAN, SPIDER-MAN, X-MEN
Hobbies and interests: Painting, and reading science fiction.

BRIAN TALLEY: *Anyone who knows comics knows that your father — John Romita, Sr. drew SPIDER-MAN for many years. How did it feel to be following in his footsteps?*

JOHN ROMITA, JR: I should say, "It was a pleasure," but he doesn't want me to think that way. He doesn't want me to belittle myself by thinking of myself as just following in his footsteps. He's an ardent fan of mine. He's a great pusher — I mean a great backer. "Pusher" is a bad

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"My dad discouraged me from doing comics."

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From IRON MAN #120: Shell-head versus Sub-Mariner. Words by Michelinie, pencils by John, Jr. with Bob Layton inks.

choice of a word. *(Laughter.)* But he's constantly pushing me to do better.

BRIAN: *Did he influence you, as far as getting into comics?*

JOHN: No. As a matter of fact, he discouraged me from being a comic-book artist. He felt that the deadline pressure was too rough, that the money — at the time I was growing up — wasn't good enough, and he didn't want me going through what he had gone through. Years ago, he had been through some tough times getting work, and he didn't want me to go through that. I became an artist because I *wanted* to be an artist — I wanted to be a comic-book artist more than anything else in the world.

BRIAN: *Did that come from reading comics when you were a kid?*

JOHN: I didn't read that many. I read some of the DC superhero books that my father would bring home — GREEN LANTERN, ATOM, HAWKMAN, some others — I found them interesting, but it wasn't until he started working for Marvel that I really got deeply interested in comics. I saw a DAREDEVIL that he was working on — the Ka-Zar issue with The Plunderer — and I fell in love with it. I was in awe of those Marvel books. Until that point I hadn't been much of an artist and certainly hadn't considered becoming a comic-book pro, but after that I began doodling, trying to draw what was in the comics.

BRIAN: *So when you decided to break into the business, Marvel seemed to be the natural place to go?*

JOHN: Right. Most of what I'd seen of DC were some romance books that my father was doing, and he wasn't very happy doing them. The Marvel books came to me when I was more wide-eyed, and I guess they stuck in my mind more. I became totally fascinated by it — the **Jack Kirby** stuff, **Steve Ditko**, **Don Heck**.

BRIAN: *So you admire Don Heck's work?*

JOHN: I know he's much maligned, but I respect his work. I think he's a damn good artist.

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BRIAN: *When you tried to break into Marvel, did having John Romita as your father open any doors for you?*

JOHN: Some — but, obviously, if I hadn't been able to do the work, they wouldn't have kept me. I was given great opportunities, but my father didn't hand them to me. My name may have hurt me more than it helped me. People figured, "Daddy's here, so Sonny will get work." I know my father was concerned with charges of nepotism. He didn't say anything, just kept himself separate from my career and let me deal with the editors and other artists on my own. His attitude was, "He's got to prove himself — he can't get work because he's my son."

BRIAN: *How did you go about proving yourself?*

JOHN: People gave me chances. **Marie Severin** gave me chances, **Larry Lieber** gave me chances, **Scott Edelman** gave me a chance to do a six-page SPIDER-MAN story, and finally **Bill Mantlo** gave me a chance to be the artist on IRON MAN. I remember **Scott Edelman** saying to me, "I don't believe in nepotism, John, but I don't believe in anti-nepotism, either. I'd like you to do some work for me." He gave me a story, "Chaos at the Coffee Bean," in SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #11. In my opinion my artwork was an abortion, but it was accepted and **Al Milgrom** inked it. They treated me very well. They're very nice people up there.

BRIAN: *What's it like working there?*

JOHN: It's always been a very loose place. I remember when I was young I

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"I impose a lot of pressure on myself."

used to visit the Bullpen once in a blue moon — I was fascinated by the artwork — and the people were so pleasant — **Marie Severin, Herb Trimpe,** the late **John Verpoorten, Stu Schwartzberg.** Since then it's become a more serious business, and the atmosphere is a little tighter, but it still has a laid-back attitude of people enjoying themselves. Not California "laid-back," but no-pressure "laid-back." The people are screwy! The most hysterical people I've ever met in my life. But it's a good working environment — constant fun, yet the work has always gotten done. They are professional people, yet they have a good time.

BRIAN: *Now that you're an established pro in your own right, what is your working relationship with your father?*

JOHN: It's more like I'm in awe of him. When I look at the stuff he used to do when he was my age, I feel there's no comparison. He was so good as a young man, and he's so good now. We're like teacher and student. I still learn many things from him. He's like the teacher I missed in high school. It's a tight relationship — we're very close and very honest. If I make a mistake, he'll tell me. And I'll ask him what he doesn't like about it. Very rarely do I not like anything of his. Work-wise, it's a very good relationship.

BRIAN: *How did you get to be a penciller on IRON MAN?*

JOHN: I was hanging around the office one day — at the time I was working for Marvel's British Department — talking with my father, when **Bill Mantlo** came in and asked him if he thought I could do IRON MAN. My father said, "I don't know. Why don't you ask him?" I said that I would like to give it a shot.

BRIAN: *The art you and Bob Layton produced for it — along with Dave Micheline's writing — helped IRON MAN go through the roof. What else do you think helped in its success?*

JOHN: The characters that were brought in were great — Mrs. Arbogast, Bethany, Jim Rhodes. I likened Bethany to Mary Jane Watson and Gwen Stacy of SPIDER-MAN — Mary Jane's looks with Gwen's intelligence — but tougher. I think that Dave and Bob's stories, and those characters, did most of the work. The artwork was easy to do with Dave's writing.

BRIAN: *Bob helped plot practically every issue you three did together as a team. Did you help with the plotting at all?*

JOHN: Only in contributing a couple of cute, tongue-in-cheek things, a laugh here and there. I'm not really needed for ideas. The plotting is done so well for me that I have nothing to add to it, most of the time.

BRIAN: *What percentage of the art was yours and what percentage Bob's?*

JOHN: I did breakdowns and Bob did finished inking. The quality of my pencils

The Web-Slinger leaps off the splash page of AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #227. John Romita, Jr. pencils — Jim Mooney, inks.

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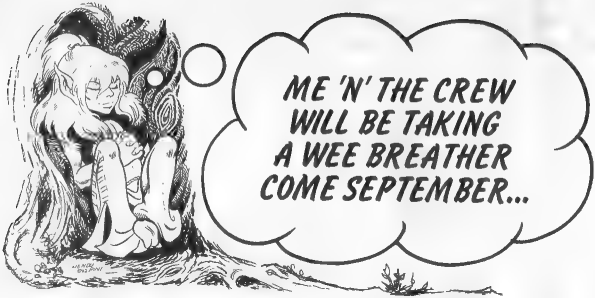

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"The people in the Marvel Bullpen are screwy!"

was not as good as it is now. I gave tight breakdowns, but I also gave screwball breakdowns. I pencilled a lot of stuff that Bob labored over — so, as hard as I worked on it, Bob worked harder. I think my pencils have improved now to the point where I don't need such over-powering inking.

BRIAN: *Are you progressing at a comfortable rate?*

JOHN: I wish I was progressing faster, but I see improvement in my work since IRON MAN. I thank **Bob Layton** for a lot of that.

BRIAN: *Do you work at home or in a studio?*

JOHN: At home.

BRIAN: *What's your average working-day like?*

JOHN: I try to get in a good ten to twelve hours of work a day, with time for meals, phone calls, and such.

BRIAN: *How many pages a day can you knock out?*

JOHN: What I *can* knock out and what I *do* knock out are two different things. I try to average three pages a day,but I rarely do because of interruptions, personal life, or sheer laziness. Whatever the reason, I should work much faster than I do.

BRIAN: *I've heard of writer's block. Is there such a thing as artist's block?*

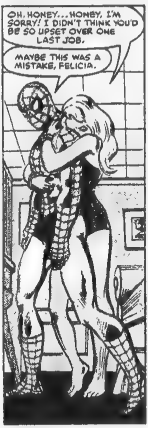
JOHN: Oh, yes, sir! I think it's worse than writer's block, in that drawing is such a physical thing. I think artist's block lasts longer, too. I've had it where it lasted for several weeks, and I didn't get over it completely until months later. But I've always produced, even if the quality suffered.

BRIAN: *You've risen in comics at a time when contemporary social issues began to figure more prominently in comics. I'm thinking of the alcoholism stories in IRON MAN, the "Angel Dust" stories in DAREDEVIL, and the gun-control issue of PETER PARKER, SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN. How do you feel about social commentary in comics?*

JOHN: I think it's great, in that it shows the progression of comics as an art form. We're not just ARCHIE and LITTLE LULU. I admire the writers for bringing in topical ideas. But it's not exactly new. There were politics way back in SPIDER-MAN #91 and #92 — the Sam Bullit issues.

BRIAN: *What about the violence in comics? Do you think that should be curtailed?*

JOHN: No, I don't. I don't think an art form should be censored to the point where it becomes unrealistic. There's nothing that says that life has to be pretty or quiet. Violence is everywhere. I don't think anything Marvel has done has been too graphic, as far as having blood/and



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A slice of Spidey's love-life. From AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #227.

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"I usually force myself to work above and beyond myself — and when I don't I get mad."

gore. There is some raw stuff, but as long as we're doing important work, I don't believe the violence has to be censored. I'm talking about violence necessary to the story. If it's unnecessary violence, then I don't believe in it. But I haven't seen any unnecessary violence, so far.

BRIAN: *It seems that the Comics Code has lightened up a bit on how far they are willing to let the violence go. How much farther do you think they will let it go before they clamp down on it?*

JOHN: I think in time they will bend more, and we'll bend more, and it'll be a good compromise. The "black blood" thing — where we don't use red blood, we use black blood — was our compromise. I don't know how much more they will bend. They've already left stickers off a couple of our books.

BRIAN: *How do you answer people who are critical of comics?*

JOHN: I don't. Because if they're ignorant enough not to read them, they have no basis for their criticism. Let them read comics first — *then* they can disagree with the way we do things.

BRIAN: *I've found that the people who criticize comics the most haven't read a comic in fifteen years.*

JOHN: It's natural. I do the same thing. I criticize things I don't know about. But the critics should look at things like X-MEN ANNUAL #4, with "Nightcrawler's Inferno." **Chris Claremont** did a take-off on Dante's INFERNO, which to me is mind-boggling — to have a comic with that kind of subject matter. There has been a lot of comic writing along that line. I'm fascinated by the ideas our writers have.

BRIAN: *How did you like drawing the CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS?*

JOHN: When I first began doing it I was thrilled. I loved the fact that I would be drawing all the characters. I really wish I could do it over again, because I'm better now than I was then. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control — the Olympic Boycott — the book had to undergo a lot of editorial changes. I still feel badly for **Mark Gruenwald,** who was the editor. He worked his heart out to get that book done properly. It was a much better book before the Boycott.

BRIAN: *Is there any character you haven't drawn yet that you would like to do?*

From issue #1 of the Marvel mini-series, CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS, Words by Bill Mantlo, pencils by John Romita, Jr., inks by Pablo Marcos.

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JOHN: All of them — Daredevil, Captain America, Fantastic Four — I love them all. I'd love to do Dr. Doom — in my opinion, the best character Marvel ever came up with.

BRIAN: *You don't consider any character a turkey?*

JOHN: I can't think of one. I think Dazzler could be helped a little bit. Not because of the artwork, but because the concept wasn't given a chance. It was laughed at, I guess because it seemed goofy to a lot of people. It wasn't handled properly because people thought it was a silly idea. "Disco Dazzler" — that one word, "disco," ruined the character's chances for success, in my estimation. DAZZLER has survived, in a way, but I don't know how much longer it will be around. I still think she's a good character. As long as they don't do a "punk" character, I'll be happy.

BRIAN: *Do you think you're in any danger of developing an ego thing?*

JOHN: An ego thing with each artist is relative. If you had an ego before you were an artist, it gets worse after you win admiration. It's a dangerous thing. A lot of artists get very proud of themselves, and I think they should keep things in

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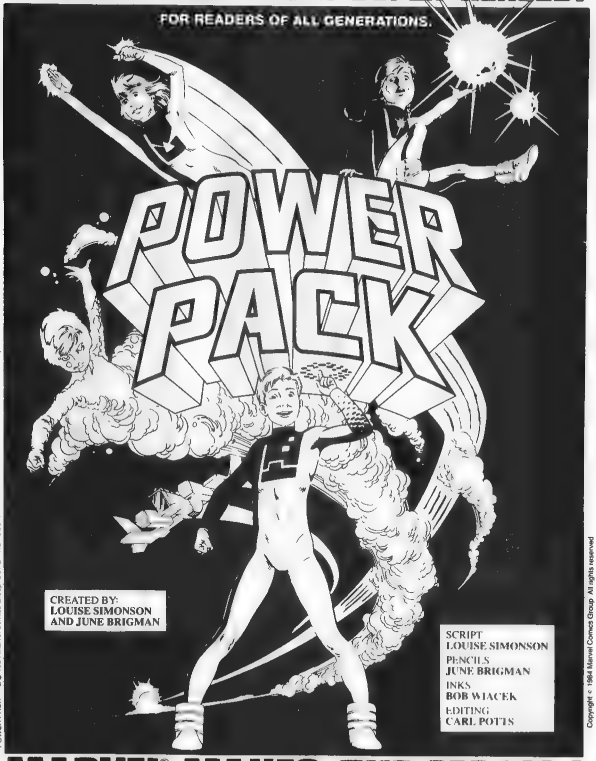

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"THE X-MEN is a 'suicide' book."

perspective. Comics is an important medium, but it's not earth-shattering. I don't think anyone should get too high and mighty.

BRIAN: *Do you think you're under control?*

JOHN: Yeah. I think I'm *too* under control. I underestimate myself. I don't think I respect my art enough. I get compliments, but I don't believe them. I work to get myself better all the time, and I don't think I'll ever be satisfied with my work. I hope I never do, because if I ever get to love my work I may turn into an egomaniac. Writers and artists have good reasons for being proud, but I always want to strive to do better.

BRIAN: *Getting back for a moment to Marvel characters, what do you think of the X-MEN?*

JOHN: They're a group that will survive no matter who does the book. The characters are so good that they will always do well. Even now, it's the best-selling book we have. No matter how good the artist is — as good as **John Byrne, Dave Cockrum** and **Paul Smith** have been on the book - no artist is going to make that book a success by himself. The artists can take their share of credit, but the writing and the characters are the constants. **Chris Claremont** has the perfect personality for a writer. He's very profound and very outgoing. X-MEN will always be at the top.

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Above and below: Interpersonal conflicts in X-MEN #183.

As we went to press Steve Saffel spotted John dropping off some artwork at the Marvel Bullpen. Acting upon opportunity, Steve persuaded John to postpone lunch long enough to discuss his new role as X-MEN artist...

STEVE SAFFEL: *How did you get involved drawing the X-MEN?*

JOHN ROMITA, JR: They needed somebody who could do the characters, and I had done them once before, in an annual, so they picked me.

STEVE: *Do you enjoy working on it?*

JOHN: Oh, yes. It's very different form SPIDER-MAN.

STEVE: *How?*

JOHN: First and most obviously, there are more characters in X-MEN — which means more characters to like. Working on SPIDER-MAN, I learned to like — as the artist — that one character, and at times I was forced to like even some of the villains With X-MEN, there are seven, and you can like them all. There are different personalities, different backgrounds — a Russian, a Canadian, an African — it's fantastic. It really expands your horizons and makes you a better artist.

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"My first Marvel artwork was an abortion."

Also, in SPIDER-MAN the locations are rather limited — mostly Manhattan. THE X-MEN is more of a fantasy or science-fiction story, and you can go anywhere and everywhere — different dimensions, stuff like that.

STEVE: *Artists often find an affinity for a certain character. Do you feel any such affinity?*

JOHN: Not quite yet. I really haven't done it long enough. Every time I think I like one character more than the other one, there's another character that comes along out of the group that really attracts my attention. It's so easy to be affected by Wolverine since he's such a great character, but because he's liked by so many people I try to pay attention to the others.

STEVE: *There any one character that you find a little more challenging, visually?*

JOHN: Kitty is challenging because, other than her power, she's such a plain character. She's just a normal teenager.

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STEVE: *How do you work with Chris Claremont?*

JOHN: He gaves me a plot and I draw from the plot — it's very simple. He's very easy to work with.

STEVE: *You commented on the locales for X-MEN being more varied than, say, on SPIDER-MAN. How do you research these locales?*

JOHN: On the issue which was set in Tokyo, I spent about six hours in the library, doing research on — Tokyo's sky-line, old Tokyo, new Tokyo, Japan's armed forces — and so on. I like to do it that way, because I don't like to go into a book having to cheat or fake anything.

STEVE: *Do you plan to be working on this book for a long time?*

JOHN: Right now there's no better opportunity than the X-MEN, so I think I'll stay here for as long as possible. They'll possibly have to beat me up to get off this book.

STEVE: *And how do you like working with your current inker, Dan Green?*

JOHN: It's a pleasure. He's such a good inker. He did the first IRON MAN book I ever did. His stuff is so nice. He has a beautiful illustrative style and he still has good solid lines — he makes me look real good.

STEVE: *Have you got anything about the X-MEN in general that you want to say?*

JOHN: Yeah. I wish there hadn't been so many good artists who had done the book before me. *(Laughter.)* It would have made it a whole lot easier on me. But it's all self-imposed pressure. That's the way I work. I usually impose a lot of pressure on myself, force myself to work above and beyond myself — and when I don't, I get mad. But the X-MEN's reputation, based on what went before, really overwhelmed me. It was a book that I'd never planned on doing, ever. I believe the word for a book like that is a "suicide" book. The previous artists — **John Byrne, Dave Cockrum, Paul Smith** — all did beautiful work. You can go on the book and keep it at its own level and never be paid attention to, because the book will stay on the same level — or, alternately, the sales will drop and you'll be known as the first person in the last ten years to drop the sales of the X-MEN! *(Laughter.)* There's a good chance of strangling your-

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"I don't like having to fake anything."

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Above and below: Lockheed the dragon and friends. Words by Claremont, art by John, Jr. and Dan Green. From X-MEN #181.

self. So I was terrified when I first started doing it.

STEVE: *To what extent have past artists work on the X-MEN influenced your own?*

JOHN: At first, I looked to **Paul Smith's** work because I didn't want to make it that much of a drastic change from artist to artist. I got a little bit of his flavor but not much — he's a completely different artist in style, and I'm not much for copying. Now I'm looking back at **Byrne's** stuff, because I happen to be a **John Byrne** fan. I think he's one of the best — if not *the* best — in the business. I think he's the ultimate X-MEN artist. It's just a matter of opinion. His stuff hit me first. It's not a matter of who I think is better or who is better. I just have a personal preference for **Byrne.**

STEVE: *It sounds like a book that you're really enthusiastic about. There have been times in the past when some artists have gotten a co-creator or co-plotter billing. Do you find yourself at all involved in the plotting?*

JOHN: Up until now, **Chris Claremont** has had his plots already fresh in his mind. He's mentioned that he's running out of ideas, as far as characters go. But plot-wise, he seems to never run out of ideas. I may never get co-plotter status but I have ideas that I'll throw toward him, if he ever needs ideas. The only ideas I'll add right now concern characters, adding new villains, and so on.

STEVE: *Are there any new characters coming up?*

JOHN: There's one named Selene who's a vampire — a vampiress — and there's a character called Vanity whose powers are connected with a mirror and other dimensions. I had thought of a couple of characters, including one called Cane. He's a character who has a special cane. That seems to be in developmental stages. I've got a couple of ideas that I haven't thrown towards him yet. I've got a character tentatively called the Butterfly, an ultimate-evil character who takes the form of a butterfly.

STEVE: *Do you have a lot of creative freedom?*

JOHN: As much as can be expected working with **Chris Claremont**, who seems to have complete control over what he wants. That's the most amazing thing about Chris — he's so spontaneous with his thoughts. They come to the tip of his tongue and he puts them right down on paper

STEVE: *It sounds like you enjoy working with him*

JOHN: I do. I'm having a lot of fun. I love everything I'm doing.

STEVE: *No complaints, then?*

JOHN: Well, I could use a hamburger right now. *(Laughter.)*

© 1984 MCG

"Starlin took me under his wing and gave me

*Tom Orzechowski is, without qualification, one of the best letterers in the business. Having begun his professional career at Marvel at the tender age of 19, Tom has continued to hone his craft through the last twelve years, lending his considerable talents to many classic Marvel titles, including CAPTAIN MARVEL, WARLOCK, and, of course, X-MEN. No stranger to independent publications, Tom was also a frequent contributor to Mike Friedrich's line of STAR*REACH Productions in the mid-'70s, and has since gone on to freelance for several other independent publishers, including both Pacific and Eclipse while still maintaining a full workload at Marvel.*

Tom is also a close friend of mine. As editor of THE TELEGRAPH WIRE for Comics & Comix in California, I've wanted to interview Tom for a long time, but he's always shrugged his shoulders in typical Orz style and begged off. No one was interested, he humbly claimed, in an interview with "just a letterer." Now, thanks to DAK and Bill — who helped me convince Tom that the time was ripe at long last — I finally have the opportunity and the pleasure to present to you one of the most highly sought-after letterers in the comics field . . .

DIANA SCHUTZ: *You've recently been putting on a workshop at various conventions called "2000 Years of Lettering." How'd that start?*

TOM ORZECHOWSKI: I was approached by the San Diego Con to do it, because they've been doing their workshops for several years quite successfully with **Harvey Kurtzman** and **Lee Marrs** and **Burne Hogarth** and just a host of people. I co-chaired a couple of conventions in the San Francisco area in the middle '70s, and I just like to keep my hand in on both sides of it. So the San Diego Con asked me to do the workshop. I put together about 40 slides, basically tracing the origins of the alphabet and their commercial use through this century, and then ending with two dozen slides on the development of logos that I've been working on lately. And I've expanded that a couple of times. I'll be doing it for the third year at San Diego this summer, which is something of a record, since they usually rotate different lecturers, and I've gotten a pretty good response. I did the workshop at Baycon in San Jose last fall and had about 30 people. I just did it at Petuniacon, the independents convention in Oakland in April, with an expanded show. I'll be expanding it further in San Diego.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Thomas Orzechowski
Occupation: Letterer
Born: 1 March 1953 — Detroit, Michigan.
Residence: San Francisco, California
Training: Self-taught.
Credits: X-MEN, SCORPIO ROSE, WIMMEN'S COMIX, ELRIC, WARLOCK, COYOTE, and many other titles too numerous to mention.
Major Influences: Artie Simek, Abe Kanegson, Alphonse Mucha, and Robert Crumb.
Favorite Music: Hardcore
Favorite Letter: S
Pet Peeve: Writers who can't spell!

DIANA: *Given your typical set-up, which is basically solitary work — you're alone, in your house, at the drawing board —*

TOM: In the cloister listening to Gregorian chants as I inscribe the Bible!

DIANA: *— how did it feel that first time at San Diego Con '82 to get up there in front of a bunch of people and talk about your craft?*

TOM: Well, it was in the dark so nobody saw the sweat stains on my shirt! There were about a dozen people each time at San Diego. I'm trying to expand the scope of the workshop and go more into practical affairs, like how to use press-type and how to make this work at fanzine level. I don't feel any restrictions in my work as a comic-book letterer and as a designer there, so I'm trying to demonstrate every possible aspect of the uses of calligraphy and type and block lettering and the whole spiel, and make it as much a coverage of the technique and intention of lettering as possible. It's a lot of fun, because I get the chance to look through my books and make decent slides of in-between stages of everything. The Con doesn't have these workshops accredited for college yet, but they're working on that. So I'm trying to be as scholarly and yet as beneficial as possible. It's a very fine line.

DIANA: *Let's go back to your beginnings, Tom. You grew up in Detroit and you were involved in fandom there, weren't you?*

TOM: Yes, I was. I did lots of fanzines. I had a letter printed in DAREDEVIL when I was 13 and started getting lots of **Howard Rogofsky** mailing lists and fanzines in the mail almost at once. Back then mail cost six cents and fanzines cost a quarter, so there were lots of mimeo'd

TOM ORZECHOWSKI

CAPTAIN MARVEL before I was ready."

Photo: L. Lois Bonilla

things around, and before long I started doing short columns and opinionated things — just longer letters of comment, really. I published for about three years real intermittently and edited FAN INFORMER for about a year and a half, just because all the regional fan activity was great. It was more fun than just through the mail. Everyone was there around me.

DIANA: *Who was in Detroit at the time?*

TOM: Early on, **Arvell Jones**, whose comics club was producing FAN INFORMER. I met him when I was fourteen. And as time went on **Terry Austin** showed up, and by the time I was seventeen I'd met and worked with **Jim Starlin, Al Milgrom, Rich Buckler, Mike Vosburg** and **Keith Pollard**. We were all playing off each other, working together and getting into print as teams, instead of just trying to be *an* artist or *a* penciller or *an* inker. It was as close to working for comics as possible and still not getting paid for it. Now I find I'm still working with some of those same guys . . . and for money!

DIANA: *What was your main interest at the time?*

TOM: I wanted to be a columnist, like a newspaper columnist — a three-dot journalist. I was writing a lot of editorials and opinionated stuff and acting as editor for a few people and organizing the club. My pencilling wasn't working out too well, so I tried inking other people's pencils. That didn't work too well either, because I was too firm a hand as an inker and too unskilled at drawing. The other guys didn't like being changed that arbitrarily! Then **Milgrom** showed up, and **Vosburg** showed up inking his own stuff, and **Buckler** was a promising inker then. I was completely outclassed by these guys who were three years older than I was. And at the same time I was doing title designs for my fanzines and others, and looking at Letraset catalogues — which **Byron Preiss** got me looking at. I was lettering people's strips, lettering titles for articles because no one could afford press-type very often, and just ended up doing that more than anything else — that and editing the scripts because I felt I had a better sense of diction and grammar.

DIANA: *Wasn't it about that time that you got the "Orz" appellation?*

TOM: Yeah, that came from FAN INFORMER around '68 or so. I had just become a guest editor of that for an issue and I did the cover because they had different artists on every cover, and I figured, "Well, it's my issue, I'll do a cover of the Blackhawks." FAN INFORMER had no fixed logo at this point — which was something I'd always admired in the undergrounds — so I did one based on the original BLACKHAWK logo and I drew a cover of them being threatened by the War Wheel. **Rich Buckler** was kind enough to ink it and salvage what was there — because it wasn't really very good — and he couldn't spell my name, so he just signed it "Orz" for me and it stuck.

DIANA: *Then, after your fan work, you went to Marvel when you were nineteen. How did you get the job?*

TOM: I had been in touch with **Tony Isabella** for about three years, and he got a job editing with **Sol Brodsky** up at Marvel doing the British weekly reprints: re-spelling certain words in the British idiom and taking out characters who hadn't been introduced in the British weeklies yet, since not all US strips were in the reprint packages. And they needed somebody to do lettering corrections. So Tony called me at work and said, "You get here in a week or else they'll hire someone through an ad in the paper." My boss was kind enough to let me leave immediately, and I was in New York City two days later.

DIANA: *So when you started working for Marvel, then, you were working in*

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"The Cosmic Code Authority' is my only footnote in the history of comics."

production. Did the lettering of the regular line of books just evolve from there?

TOM: Marvel was a small operation then and I was working at the same time they began MONSTERS UNLEASHED and the other black-and-whites, so I was doing those as well. I did the earliest issues of SAVAGE TALES and that sort of thing, correcting **Barry Smith**'s lead stories and lettering back-up stories for those same issues.

DIANA: *What was the first book that you lettered rather than corrected?*

TOM: I don't know. I'd have to dig through invoices. My first color comic was TOMB OF DRACULA #11, and I did black-and-whites for about three months before that.

DIANA: *During your first years at Marvel, you must have been working with that whole second wave of artists who came in around the early '70s, right?*

TOM: Yeah, the fan connections. **Buckler** had me doing BLACK PANTHER by him and **Don McGregor**, and because of that connection I've worked with Don on and off ever since. **Starlin** generously took me under his wing and gave me CAPTAIN MARVEL before I was ready for it, and connected me with **Steve Englehart**, who got me MASTER OF KUNG FU, and I've worked with Steve ever since.

DIANA: *Speaking of Jim Starlin, didn't you do some playing around with the Comics Code symbol on one of his books?*

TOM: It was the second episode of "Warlock" in STRANGE TALES. There was a gag that **Milgrom** came up with, that "comics" and "cosmic" are spelled almost the same, so he decided to take an issue of CAPTAIN MARVEL and change the little corner sticker to "The Cosmic Code Authority." It was caught, and they figured "Well, good thing we stamped this one out before it got any further," and so they didn't notice when I did the same thing on STRANGE TALES #179. And it's never been done since, but I got a commemorative T-shirt out of that one from **Eliot Brown.** I think that's my only footnote in the history of comics.

DIANA: *You lettered pretty much exclusively for Marvel for a while, right?*

TOM: **Bill DuBay** offered me all I wanted at Warren after I'd been at Marvel about three months, because he was working with **Buckler** and **Milgrom** and **McGregor** right then. I turned him down because

Warren was Warren, but Marvel was Marvel, and I was still a fan. But I was very dissatisfied living in New York and left there after about eight months. **Mike Friedrich** was in town that July, and he said "I've convinced a number of guys to move west with me and begin Star*Reach."

It sounded okay, because I hated New York and he said I'd love California. He was right. **Englehart, Frank Brunner, Starlin, Al Weiss** and myself moved west that summer and settled pretty much in Oakland and San Francisco. I started lettering STAR*REACH that same year.

DIANA: *So you were right in at the start with the independents, then?*

TOM: Yeah. STAR*REACH, being creator-owned, was a lot looser and it was a lot of fun and real gratifying working with the young turks and being able to letter words like "fuck". It got me in touch with early **Howard Chaykin** material, too.

DIANA: *So you moved out here for a while with the Star*Reach crew, but then you went back to New York before moving to California again. How did you feel about living in New York?*

TOM: I found New York to be a real strain and a very tense situation — a city too big for me to manage. It was affecting my work. I moved to California after being in business about eight months,

Tom lettered this album cover for Moby Dick Records.
Art by Trina Robbins.

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"Things started to slide out of control."

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The display lettering on this splash page shows one variation of the special alphabet Orzechowski designed for THE X-MEN. Tom talks about this — and other aspects of his X-MEN work — in the next issue of COMICS INTERVIEW.

stayed five years, and learned most of what I know right at that point. I wasn't making any money because I was living largely off STAR*REACH and whatever Marvel could send me. I had to go back to New York to touch bases and renew acquaintances before I could move back west again.

DIANA: *When you first moved away from New York, it wasn't really standard practice to send pages out to letterers living far away, was it?*

TOM: Yes and no. **Englehart** and **Starlin** were here, so I was lettering all of Jim's projects and most of Steve's until deadlines became a real hassle. Up until five years ago, the system had worked to where Steve would plot, say, an issue of CAPTAIN AMERICA, send the plot to **Sal Buscema** to pencil it, he'd send it back to Steve who'd script it, I'd letter it, we'd send it to **Frank McLaughlin** who'd ink it, then the Marvel office in New York City would see it for the first time when it was done. But about five years ago, they hired **Roger Stern** and **Ralph Macchio** and **Jo Duffy** and started assigning different books to different specific editors to supervise the directions of the books — act as true editors and keep schedules intact instead of just letting everything sail off in the distance. None of us were doing that well with schedules at that point. WARLOCK was a bi-monthly and Jim could handle that, but Steve was doing three or more monthlies, and it started to slide out of control.

DIANA: *Well, you were all partying up in the hills of Orinda, weren't you?*

TOM: Well, yeah. *(Laughter.)* There's that, too. Anyway, Steve's work was taken largely away from me, so I started depending on STAR*REACH, and as that dwindled pretty much to nothing after about three or four years, I had to go back to New York and live in their system for a few years. **Chris Claremont** and I got along pretty well, so I've been working pretty exclusively with him ever since.

Next issue, in Part Two: Staying out of Bill Sienkiewicz's way . . . why Dark Phoenix spoke in such ragged balloons . . . flattery from Mark Evanier . . . Tom's philosophy of lettering . . . why letterers don't get royalties . . . and all about designing an alphabet for THE X-MEN.

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"When people ask us what Pacific Comics is after, we tell them, 'Excellence.'"

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DAVID SCROGGY

Pacific Comics is one of the most rapidly-expanding of the alternative comics companies. As PC's Editorial Director, David Scroggy plays a crucial role in helping publishers Bill and Steve Schanes pilot the Pacific fleet through the storm-tossed, reef-laden and wreckage-strewn waters of the comic-book marketplace. Recently, in Hollywood, interviewer Jeff Gelb met David for lunch at Denny's Restaurant on fabled Sunset Boulevard, and asked the urbane editor a wide assortment of probing questions about his job, his background in fandom, and the diverse, sometimes controversial titles that Pacific publishes (ALIEN WORLDS, TWISTED TALES, SUN RUNNERS, GROO, and Jack Kirby's CAPTAIN VICTORY, to name a smattering). David's frank replies give us an insider's insight into the perils, pitfalls and pleasures of comics publishing, while illuminating some of the burning issues of the day: adult material in comics . . . censorship . . . the flood of mainstream reprints . . . and the nexus (if we may use that term!) of rock music, comic books, and Akron, Ohio.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: David Scroggy
Occupation: Editorial Director for Pacific Comics
Born: 19 December 1951 — Akron, Ohio
Residence: San Diego, CA
Training: School of Hard Knocks. (Laughter.) Actually, I had some college at Kent State, then was a Fellow of the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, MA, where I had a grant to write poetry.
Credits: As Editorial Director: VANGUARD ILLUSTRATED, EDGE OF CHAOS, VANITY, DARKLON THE MYSTIC, THE ROCKETEER. Wrote column, "Wugga, Wugga!" for COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.
Favorite movie: HARVEY
Favorite rock group: The Pretenders
Pet Peeve: MTV. Traffic jams. The weatherman on Channel 39.

JEFF GELB: *We both know Chris Hynde of The Pretenders from our college days and it's interesting that one of her songs from their first album mentions HOWARD THE DUCK.*

DAVID SCROGGY: Well, **Mike Smith** of Hi-Di-Ho Comics told me that a limousine pulled up and **Chrissie Hynde** emerged, and spent about a half hour in the store, buying almost exclusively **R. Crumb.**

JEFF: *Why are there no rock'n'roll comic books?*

DAVID: That's a good question. It's one that I've thought a lot about, and discussed with **Bruce Jones** and **April Campbell,** who have thought a lot about it, too. So far, no one seems to have married the two *genres* very well. We've certainly seen a lot of attempts. We have a story for VANGUARD ILLUSTRATED by **Mike Baron** which takes place at a rock concert and adds a new twist to the *genre*. There was an attempt by **Paul Power** called ROCK WARRIOR but really no one's

"When we began as publishers, we had to

ever done it properly. HEAVY METAL has certainly tried it often, too, but why do they not gel? I don't know. It seems as if they would. But we'd like to do something like that. I think the NEXUS idea of adding the music to the comic might be the answer. Perhaps someone can hit it, using new techniques, maybe integrating photo collage. It calls for something a little more innovative than just the traditional line art with color.

JEFF: *How did you get started working with Pacific?*

DAVID: Well, I'd been a cook for many years when I was writing poetry — poets don't make much money — so I got into the restaurant trade and I finally got tired of it just at the moment when Pacific was expanding from one store to two and needed a manager. So I came in managing their main store and basically evolved with the company and its various entities, as retailer, wholesaler, limited edition publisher, and finally comic-book publisher. Now, I'm engaged full time with various aspects of the books with promotion and that type of thing — but largely with editorial directing and strictly working with the publications.

JEFF: *Are you the sole editorial director of Pacific, or does Bruce Jones edit his own stuff?*

DAVID: Well, Bruce does edit his own stuff, and there are other people who edit their own stuff, too. Bruce's books are all completely edited and packaged by **Bruce Jones** and **April Campbell** — they are clearly marked "Bruce Jones Associates." Those books are TWISTED TALES, ALIEN WORLDS, SOMERSET HOLMES and the forthcoming PATHWAYS TO FANTASY.

When it comes down to the new titles, I certainly have a lot of say. But ultimately **Bill** and **Steve Schanes** are the ones who sign the checks, not me.

JEFF: *Suppose Bruce handed in something that you didn't like?*

DAVID: Well, we certainly have a give-and-take relationship with Bruce and April. We've tried to give them a free hand, as much as possible. We're not there to stifle them arbitrarily. And a book like Bruce's TWISTED TALES is obviously different from the rest of our line. Bruce and April have a free hand to be a little more outrageous in the context of a horror tale. Certainly there are other books that are, in effect, packaged for us, such as GROO, and **Jack Kirby**'s material, too. Sometimes it's frustrating as an editor to be in such a situation. That's why you really have to be very careful in who you work with. We have been fortunate in surrounding ourselves with talent of such caliber that it certainly hasn't been as big a problem as it could have been. But it does create a situation where, from a totally objective, commercial viewpoint, you might want to change something to emphasize the strengths of the creators, and minimize their weaknesses, but are not able to do so because the creators are providing an entire package themselves.

JEFF: *Have you ever had to cancel a book that was coming out because it overstepped some kind of boundary?*

DAVID: We haven't had to cancel anything for that reason, no. We work with creators who pretty much understand our marketplace, and we really don't have them giving us material that we deem unworthy of publication very often. They know the type of outlets that these books are being sold in, and they're aware of the "image" that the publishers are trying to maintain. We certainly are trying to maintain an adult image but we are very careful that the word "adult" does not conjure up some smarmy image of sex and violence, since that's really not what we're publishing.

JEFF: *As editorial director do you try to read everything before it goes to the printer?*

DAVID: Absolutely.

"We're trying to make VANGUARD commercial by using top cover artists." Cover by "good girl art" specialist Dave Stevens, of ROCKETEER fame.

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learn by doing, and we made a lot of mistakes."

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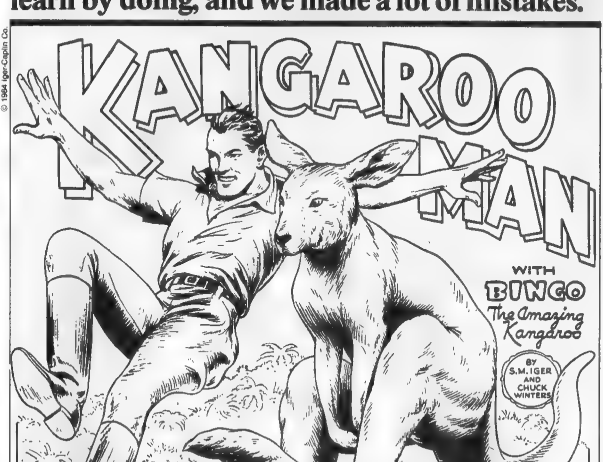

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JEFF: *What's a typical work day like?*

DAVID: Well, in my case it'll vary quite a bit depending on what time of the month it is and how close our deadlines are. It can range from quiet development of a character to frantic screaming at an inker, from just getting the work in, to making sure that the books move along their various stops — writer, penciller, inker, and so forth — on schedule. My contribution will vary depending upon the title. With a book like GROO, my contribution is minimal, when it comes to the creative production aspects of it. In the case of a book like VANGUARD, where there's a lot of editing, many hands working on the book, certainly the job of coordinator alone is a more time-consuming task. Much of my job consists of keeping tabs on everything currently in production as books move along toward publication. It also involves trying to go through new ideas, new developments, reading manuscripts that come in — at least scanning them — and writing copy for our advertisements and brochures. It can involve some promotion activities — say, setting up a store or an autograph-signing by one of our writers or artists. It'll also involve reading and sorting through the fan mail and keeping tabs on the readers survey. I query individual retailers on how books might be doing. And then I take lunch.

JEFF: *And a four-hour siesta.* (Laughter.)

DAVID: No, usually I get about fifteen minutes to scarf a sandwich, then it's back in up to the elbows.

JEFF: *You also have a career as an artist's agent, correct?*

DAVID: Yes, I now represent four artists: **Rick Geary, John Pound, Chris Miller** and **Joe Chiodo.**

JEFF: *How the heck do you have time for that, on top of your editorial duties?*

DAVID: It's becoming more difficult . . . as the artists become bigger and Pacific Comics gets bigger, too.

JEFF: *Yeah, let's talk about how big Pacific is getting. You have on schedule now how many books per month?*

DAVID: We'll have ten, I believe, in late June, and then another twelve coming in July. We're definitely going to be increasing our output.

JEFF: *Does that increase reflect an increased summer market, or an output*

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"People take their funnybooks real serious."

JEFF: *What about* **Bruce Jones'** fantasy project?

DAVID: In coordination with Bruce Jones as the packager, we're coming out with PATHWAYS TO FANTASY, which will be a 32-page bi-monthly fantasy anthology. Some stories are written by **Bruce Jones** , other stories by other writers. The illustration credits for the first issue, which we'll be seeing this summer, reads as though it's a Who's Who of fantasy artists, starting with a gorgeous cover and seven-page story by **Barry Windsor-Smith.** There's also a four-page story by **John Bolton,** and five pages by **Jay Muth.**

JEFF: *What do you guys define as fantasy? Are we going to see nothing but little elves?*

DAVID: Oh, hardly. I don't think you'd be expecting that from **Bruce Jones'** hands, or mine, would you? You might think in terms of THE ARABIAN NIGHTS or some of the real classics of fantasy. It'll run the gamut. It'll be seasoned by elves and dragons, but that won't be the main course.

JEFF: *Is there any reason why none of your books are monthly?*

DAVID: Well, that's not exactly true right now. VANGUARD ILLUSTRATED is a monthly, and JERRY IGER'S FAMOUS FEATURES may be a monthly. And we do plan other monthlies as well. However, we feel that the increased shelf-life of a bi-monthly book is an advantage as so many people — the audience for Pacific, certainly — are just discovering these books. We really feel that our potential readers are just discovering comic-book stores. We're trying to widen the market, and we feel having a book on the stands a little bit longer really does give it a healthier sales period — as long as we can truly maintain a bi-monthly schedule. Our problem is that our bi-monthly books do not always come out every two months.

JEFF: *That's my next question: Can Pacific get on schedule?*

DAVID: Yes, I think that we are getting on schedule now. The newer titles are on schedule, or at least they will be soon. It's going to take about a year of being on schedule before people can trust us again. We did a marketing experiment with SUN RUNNERS where we released issue #1 and #2 about a month apart and then had it adopt a bi-monthly schedule, and it seems to have paid off in sales. We're going to try a similar strategy with ECHO OF FUTURE PAST, which **Neal Adams** is packaging and which we're distributing. Issues #1 and #2,

Above and below: Barry Windsor-Smith art from PATHWAYS TO FANTASY #1. Words by Bruce Jones, who also writes TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS.

which contain continuous stories, will be released a month apart, and then they'll be adopting a bi-monthly schedule. Certainly frequency seems to have helped a

book like SUN RUNNERS while diminishing interest in books like THE ROCKETEER. By the same token, the same could be said after talking to retailers of CAMELOT 3000, RONIN, and SOMERSET HOLMES. When you have a continuing story, it is vitally important to publish it on time.

JEFF: *What's the reason that books fall behind schedule?*

DAVID: Well, there's a lot of different reasons. To be candid, part of the reason is that when we began as publishers, we had to learn by doing, and we made a lot of mistakes. Being in the public eye, we got to make our mistakes in public, in a lot of different areas. If you look at the Pacific comics coming out today, you'll see a definite improvement in all aspects. The key thing we're going for now is punctuality, and a more considered product. I think the punctuality has gotten better, and I think the material, all in all, has gotten better — everything from our logo to the colors. As for why the books are late, part of it is that we are a smaller company. It's expensive to produce a comic, and artists and writers don't come cheap. It was difficult for under-capitalized publishers such as ourselves to get as far ahead as we really would like to be.

Art © 1984 Barry Windsor-Smith Words © 1984 Bruce Jones

"If you were to compare comics to films,

Will Meugniot's Vanity. From Issue #2.

© 1984 Will Meugniot

But certainly no one is immune from deadline problems. We've seen it across the board, in other companies. I will tip my hat to First Comics as being the most punctual, and I think that's helped their books a great deal.

JEFF: *But I sometimes get the feeling that they're lumping you guys in with Marvel and DC and that they're the alternatives.*

DAVID: I don't know if they would agree with that. I remember reading something from **Rick Obadiah,** First's publisher, saying he resented the term "alternative publisher." If you read through our books, you'll see we're really quite free with our plugs for the other companies and what their creators are doing. We feel any widening of the market is good. If AMERICAN FLAGG can get a lot of publicity and bring readers into the shops to check out the new comics, our books will stand on their own and compete with anyone's in the marketplace. Any publicity that can get people into the stores is good. It's a big world out there. We really have tried to keep a non-competitive profile, within reason.

JEFF: *What about allegations that some of the other publishers — DC and especially Marvel — are really trying to eat up your dollars with reprint books?*

DAVID: As I announce our reprint line — *(Laughter.)*

JEFF: *Well, the Iger reprint is really something else.*

DAVID: There will be a few other reprints, too. We've negotiated a deal with Quality Comics in England to reprint some of the WARRIOR material in comic-book form in the United States, and you'll be seeing that this summer, too.

JEFF: *Including MARVELMAN?*

DAVID: We don't know whether we'll have a problem with MARVELMAN or not. It may come out in this country under a different name. But I'd like to say — concerning the glut of reprints — that if you have a superior product, it doesn't matter if there are a hundred and twenty other comics out there or not. If we have the best stuff, we're banking on people buying our books.

JEFF: *I understand what you're saying, but does the glut actually cut into sales?*

DAVID: We enjoy the advantage of being distributors and we are able to analyze sales information very closely. We really do spend a lot of time on graphs and charts and trying to make all that data make sense, and I think that there's no

we certainly don't go beyond an R rating."

© 1983 Larry Hama & Michael Golden

Michael Golden illustrates the Larry Hama story, "Bucky O'Hare," in Neal Adams' ECHO OF FUTUREPAST, distributed by Pacific Comics.

question that the upsurge in comics from Marvel and DC — in particular Marvel — cut into everyone's business. Also, the proliferation of *new* publishers have cut into our business, too. Also, you're finding very conservative buying patterns on the part of the retailers, due to the fact that they are buying on a non-refundable basis and are buying to sell out, to see what their maximum sales will be.

JEFF: *It's a guessing game every issue.*

DAVID: It is.

JEFF: *Isn't that dangerous for you guys, the publishers?*

DAVID: No, because our market share is very healthy. Percentage-wise, with the exception of about fifteen or twenty runaway bestsellers that are enjoying both newsstand and direct sales distibution, the Pacific Comics line enjoys a really healthy market percentage *vis-a-vis* our competition. And the **Schanes** brothers seem to be taking the tack that the best defense is a good offense, so they're gearing up production. At the same time, we see some of the smaller independents gearing down, in a survival move. When Pacific started publishing we were in the midst of a recession. Consequently, we didn't just follow the lead. We've approached comics with the attitude of business people trying to blaze a new ground in *all* aspects of comics production — not merely the aesthetics, which is what everybody notices.

JEFF: *What do top-of-the-line Pacific comics sell?*

DAVID: It most decidedly has changed from the days when we first started publishing and there wasn't quite as much competition. A successful book sold anywhere from 80,000 to 100,000 copies. Today, it's tightened up a bit, and while we don't like to be precise with our sales figures, it probably would average between 30,000 to 80,000 copies an issue.

JEFF: *Can a book that sells thirty thousand copies be profitable?*

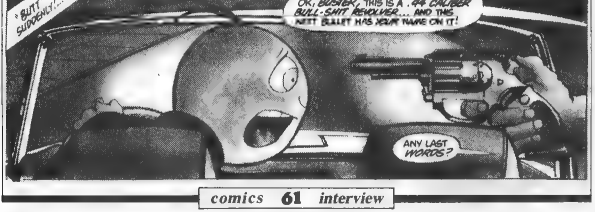
DAVID: Well, not as profitable as we'd like it to be. I'd say thirty thousand to thirty-five thousand copies is certainly the break-even point for most of our books. With that in mind, and with sales tightening up, that's why we're exploring advertising sections for our books. We have really tried to stay away from it for a long time, but we really do feel now that if we can solicit the right kind of advertising and present it in the proper manner, that will help us. We should be adding an additional eight pages of advertising to our books, making them forty pages, at no additional cost. In fact, in terms of the thirty-two page format of a comic, it may actually enable us to give the readers a little more story. We certainly haven't crossed that bridge yet. But we do want a very polished kind of advertising, not the kind that one currently sees in newsstand comics. We're interested in a very nice, slick presentation that doesn't interfere with the art and story.

JEFF: *What kind of products would you sell? Comics-oriented stuff?*

DAVID: I think we have a different demographics to offer comics advertisers than comic books have traditionally offered advertisers. Our readers' surveys are there for a reason, and one of the reasons is to indicate demographics. This kind of information is what you need to lure advertisers. What we're looking for is full-page ads from film studios, full-page ads for products that reach our demographics — there'll be no liquor ads or cigarette ads, which we could probably get right now if we wanted.

JEFF: *What about arcade games?*

Also from ECHO OF FUTUREPAST: Tippie Toe Jones meets Son of Stan. Words by Lindley Farley, pencils by Louis Mitchell, inks by Neal Adams.



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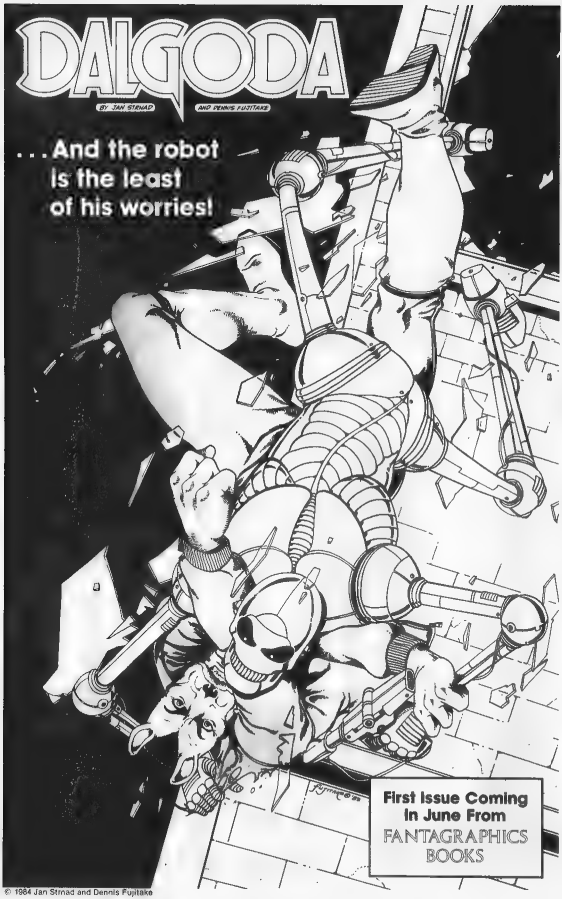

© 1984 Jan Strnad and Dennis Fujitake

"SUN RUNNERS appears to be a fast mover. Maybe people do want superheroes after all."

© 1984 Roger McKenzie & Patrick Broderick

DAVID: Well . . . sure, why not? We've had inquiries from computer software people. But basically we're looking for advertisers who want to reach a seventeen-to-thirty-year-old, largely-male readership that has a little spare change in their pockets — enough to plunk down a dollar-fifty for a comic book.

JEFF: *It's interesting that you talk about the demographics of your comic books and how it's mostly male because Pacific doesn't really publish any straight super-hero comic.*

DAVID: Well, certainly the **Kirby** material could be considered as constituting super-hero fare, and there's a super-hero aspect to SUN RUNNERS. But, by and large, we've really felt — and this was sort of what motivated us to get into comics publishing in the first place — that super-heroes was such an over-used *genre* that we might go further with something different.

JEFF: *But your efforts along those lines haven't brought you a significantly higher readership.*

DAVID: The key to diversifying comic-book material is getting the proper audience into the comic-book stores. It all gets down to the front line — the retailers. We need to see comic-book stores start to appear in malls, with a little more sophisticated presentation — a little nicer store, more appealing, perhaps — and get more and more women into the comic-book stores and looking at the material. I think the reason ELFQUEST was such a Cinderella story is not because it's woman-oriented —I don't think it is — but because it appeals *equally* to men and women.

JEFF: *It's interesting to me that Bruce Jones and April Campbell haven't introduced a romance comic. Because of the work Bruce has done in KA-ZAR, which is very male/female relationship oriented, I would think of him as being perhaps the perfect person to try a romance comic for Pacific.*

DAVID: Bruce and April certainly get into man/woman interpersonal relationships in their shorter stories for ALIEN WORLDS and TWISTED TALES. It's certainly tempting to test the waters with some of this **Iger** material, since he and **Matt Baker** came up with some of the *creme de la creme* of romance comics. But as for a romance comic *per se* . . . no *serious* discussion. There has been some discussion of a comic book about a relationship between a man and a woman.

McKenzie's and Broderick's hit series, SUN RUNNERS.

JEFF: *Are we talking night-time TV soap-opera comics?*

DAVID: Hopefully, not quite like that. Episodic fiction has certainly a lot of directions in which to go — and which it does go in other countries. But again, it's getting the potential audience into the shops that's the first step. It's tempting to say that SOMERSET HOLMES is a book that hasn't found its audience, but I think its audience hasn't found it. Which isn't to say that SOMERSET HOLMES is a poor seller. It isn't, in the direct market. But certainly when you look at the type of book it is, and the mass market audience that's out there for that sort of material, I think we've only just begun.

JEFF: *Would you feel comfortable saying what your best-selling book is, without saying what it sells?*

DAVID: ALIEN WORLDS is probably our best-selling book, month in and month out. Both TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS enjoy very steady audience — people who buy the title, not just because, say, **George Perez** is in it this month. Our best-selling book ever was MS. MYSTIC #1. Our second best-selling book ever were PACIFIC PRESENTS #1 and #2 — the first and second appearances of THE ROCKETEER in its own book. **Neal Adams** brings them in, no doubt about that. Certainly our earlier books were better, sales-wise. CAPTAIN VICTORY #1 and STARSLAYER #1 were very large sellers compared to what has come afterward. But month in and month out, I'd say it was ALIEN WORLDS. I should also say that in the comic shops SUN RUNNERS is making a very strong bid. It appears to be a very fast mover, and it seems that it will be moving up in our line very quick. Maybe people do want super-heroes after all.

JEFF: *You can't fight success. It's interesting to me that you named Bruce Jones' ALIEN WORLD as your consistent best seller. How things change! I always thought of the horror and SF books that he does*

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TROILUS

SAER OEN

DANIEL BERENSON

The cast of "Avalone," from VANITY #2. Art by David Ross and Rick Bryant.

for you as being his version of the old EC books, and everybody knows that the old EC science-fiction books never sold worth a damn.

DAVID: No science-fiction comic ever sold worth a damn. Horror probably sold poorly, too, for a long time. A few years ago, just before we announced TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS, I happened to find myself in DC's office telling **Paul Levitz** about them and his reaction to a horror anthology and a science fiction anthology was — well, he could only cackle and say, "It's *your* budget." But we really felt the time was right. We felt that we had been successful in bringing very top talent into these books, both with Bruce and the people he was able to get to contribute to the books, either because of their personal friendship or respect for him. That was the reason for the success of those books. Their debt to EC is obvious, but we don't feel they copy EC. We do feel they add a contemporary slant to a time-honored format.

JEFF: *We haven't talked about VANITY yet.*

DAVID: VANITY is a really interesting book. It's the brainchild of **Will Meugniot.** The lead feature, VANITY is designed to be a lot of fun. It touches on a wide range of human relationships, the context science-fiction and adventure, and with touches of good-girl art as well. It's really all a bit tongue-in-cheek. If people approach VANITY with the right expectations — which is merely to have a good time with it — they'll be quite satisfied. You know, a lot of people take their funnybooks *real* serious and if they come to it with that point of view, they probably won't find it to be a lot of substance. We're very keen on the back-up feature, AVALONE, a very straight adventure that we think is really exceptional. It's plotted and illustrated by a major new talent — someone you'll be hearing a lot from — **David Ross**, a Canadian artist. He's also done a story for Marvel — a MARVEL FANFARE feature with the X-Men — so they have a lot of faith in him, too. It's scripted by **David Campiti**, who's a very promising young writer. So the book strikes a good balance, with a very light-hearted title feature and a very straight science-fiction back-up feature.

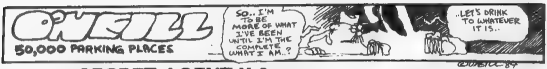
JEFF: *VANGUARD is your only monthly book. Does that mean it's been a runaway success, or just that you have a lot of material — or both?*

DAVID: Well, it's not been quite the success that some of the other books

KRODON

LAUREN

DEMOS



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"There's a lot of paranoia in the fan press."

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have. Presenting new talent is difficult. We're working very hard to make VANGUARD a viable commercial entity. I really feel the title VANGUARD, without blazing "new talent" all over the cover, is actually a point in its favor. We're trying to make it a commercial entity by using top cover artists, and by teaming up a new talent with an established professional, at least one story per issue. We had **Bob McLeod** in the second issue with a **Dave Stevens** cover. That was a great move because it actually helped sell issue #1. And we've continued with great covers by the likes of **Michael Kaluta** and **George Perez**. But we do get a lot of material. There are an awful lot of people out there trying to break into comic books. Certainly with this New Renaissance, as some people have called it, a lot of new artists coming out of art schools are being attracted to comics as a career for the first time. Before it was something you did if you couldn't get anything else, and it was a job you weren't proud of. It's very important to have a proving ground for this new talent. They need a showcase.

JEFF: *Many of your books are more adult than anything on the market. Do you see censorship on the horizon?*

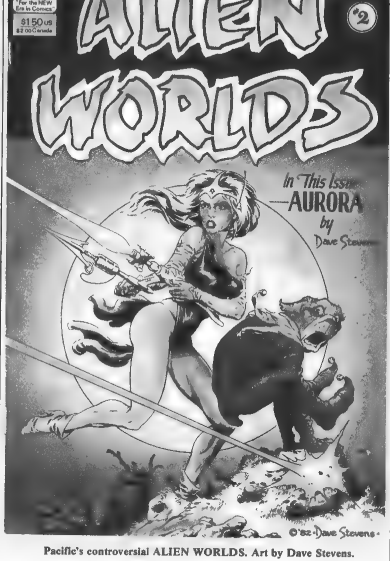
DAVID: Well, I hear a lot of things on that, pro and con. If you were to compare comics to films, we certainly don't go beyond an **R** rating. I've certainly encountered a lot of paranoia in the fan press. The major media don't seem to be as shocked by our adult themes as a lot of people in fandom are expecting them to be. Could it be that the real world doesn't find them quite so shocking as we're afraid they will? Could it be that people in modern America don't have the same mentality that they did in 1950, with regard to the content in comic books? Certainly, we have had some cases of people objecting to TWISTED TALES falling into the wrong hands, but honestly, by and large we've had really quite little in the way of negative reaction to our books.

JEFF: *Have you ever gotten letters from irate parents?*

DAVID: Once in a while.

JEFF: *Do you respond to them?*

DAVID: Depends on the letter. We got our first negative letter from a mother in 1977, when we put out a back issue comic-book catalog with a **Frank Frazetta** cover. We got a letter advising us to read some enclosed religious tracts, and that if we didn't we were all going to burn in hell for putting this **Frazetta** painting in the hands of this woman's ten-year-old son.



Pacific's controversial ALIEN WORLDS. Art by Dave Stevens.

We obviously are aware of the possibility of censorship, and that's why we put "Recommended for Mature Readers" on our comic books. We work very hard to define the word "Mature" as not being the image of gratuitous sex and violence that it conjures up with a lot of people, but really just something a little more sophisticated. So, while it is a concern of ours, and a concern of retailers, too, we really don't find it necessary to restrict the sale of our books, and we probably wouldn't be all that interested in a ratings system, either. But we are interested in minimizing problems for the retailer. We do realize that some of the books we do are for an older audience, and try to market them as being for mature readers, so that all the way down the distribution chain, anybody who feels they are objectionable can deal with the books accordingly.

JEFF: *As a matter of fact, I frequent a comic shop where they have a sign over ALIEN WORLDS and TWISTED TALES saying "You must be 18 to buy this book."*

DAVID: Well, I don't think legally you have to be, but we'll allow each dealer to make that determination.

JEFF: *Is there a logical price ceiling on*

DAVID SCROGGY

"Pacific Comics didn't just follow the

Michael Golden cover for ECHO OF FUTUREPAST #3.

comics? Times seem to prove that there isn't, and you guys are about to come out with a comic that costs three dollars!

DAVID: Well, we are about to *distribute* a book that costs three dollars — **Neal Adams'** ECHO OF FUTURE PAST, which I feel might have enjoyed a much larger sale at a lower price point. On the other hand, it really took an exceptional amount of work and involved exceptionally high production costs. We currently have no plans to sell any PC-imprint comic books for over two dollars. **Neal Adams'** Continuity Studios seems to feel that $2.95 is an acceptable price for their forty-eight page package, and we have enough faith in ECHO OF FUTURE PAST that we're certainly willing to distribute it.

JEFF: *Is that going to be a Pacific imprint?*

DAVID: No. The logo on that comic book will be Continuity Graphics. **Neal Adams** is actually producing a line of comic books, of which ECHO is the first title. By the time this interview is printed, you will probably have heard about ZERO PATROL, also MEGALITH, and you will probably be hearing about other **Neal Adams** Continuity Comics. It's an ever-changing world, and who knows? Neal may decide at some point that he can support his own distribution and decide to break off, but for the foreseeable future, we are the exclusive distributor of Continuity Comics.

JEFF: *People are asking about kids and comics, and whether kids are still being brought into the medium. Are they, and if not, is price one of the reasons?*

DAVID: Oh, I think obviously when you have a book that's $1.50 or $2.00, or a graphic novel at $5.95, you're sort of automatically indicating an adult audience. It's interesting to think of comics as something people grow into rather than grow *out of*. It's definitely a concern of a lot of people in the industry that we might be losing the younger readers.

JEFF: *Do you have any plans to attract younger readers?*

DAVID: Well, we've seen some really nicely-done comic books that would be geared toward a somewhat more juvenile audience. But I think kids are really pretty sophisticated at eight, ten and twelve years old — a lot more so than in the past. So you might have a book like GROO that is really geared toward an adult mentality but is enjoyed and understood by younger readers. You could pick quite a few examples of that in all kinds of *genres*. But really, we don't quite have the resources to explore the younger-reader market as much as we would like.

JEFF: *Have you then made a calculated decision that you're not going to approach young readership?*

DAVID: When people ask us what is "house style" or what we're after as a company, what we'll generally tell them is, "Excellence". And certainly if the right package came along, we would probably go for it, but, realistically, we'll probably continue to leave the juvenile market for others and continue to concentrate on the young adult market that we're reaching today.

JEFF: *When you guys started, the big deal about Pacific Comics was creators' rights. At this point, what has that actually gotten your creators, financially, that they couldn't have gotten working through the old system? In other words, are they making more money?*

DAVID: Well, we still haven't seen results in such areas as major licensing. However, I believe that we are going to. Without saying more than I reasonably can, I know for a fact that there is definite

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lead. We've tried to blaze new ground."

© 1983 Will Meugniot

interest, in both films and television, in some of the Pacific titles. **Jack Kirby** and **Sergio Aragones** certainly enjoy greater revenues in the area of overseas licensing than they would have enjoyed through the old system. Certainly **Neal Adams** made quite a lot more money on MS. MYSTIC #1 — based on its high sale and therefore higher royalties — than he ever would have done under the old system. I think it's obvious that creator-owned comics have created a better deal for creators at every company, including the latest development we're seeing, the announcement of creator-owned newsstand comics through Marvel. One of those titles will be GROO.

JEFF: *Is that a source of frustration — Marvel buying away one of your titles?*

DAVID: Well, what do you think, Jeff? *(Laughter.)* I'll be very sorry to see GROO go. But **Sergio Aragones** will let you know, privately and publicly, that this is not the basis of us giving him a raw deal. It's an opportunity for him to reach a greater audience and wider marketplace and still retain the creator control and ownership that he feels is necessary to produce his work.

JEFF: *I think the interesting thing is that he feels the book will sell better ID than it does direct.*

DAVID: And I am probably forced to agree with him, based on the fact that Sergio is such a strongly-proven commodity in the mass marketplace. GROO is still not at the bottom end of the Pacific line, but even though everyone seems to like it, a lot of people in the direct-sales marketplace still enjoy an extreme fascination with super-heroes and are quite unwilling to broaden their horizons.

JEFF: *But this means that the direct-sales concept is not the total success story, or savior of comics, that everyone thinks it is.*

DAVID: Well, I think you have to take a longer view. We're in a marketplace that's expanded over the past five years from virtually nothing into a multimillion dollar business, and I think that if the marketplace continues to expand direct-sales will become more and more viable. You know, even with a low-run book you're talking about a lot of dollars and cents. And I do believe, taking the longer view, that direct-sales is the wave of the future — but perhaps not for every title. I really don't know. The marketplace is in an extremely fluid state. What the state of affairs is as we speak might be something quite different by the time this interview appears in print. Even in the short run the marketplace is going to be changing.

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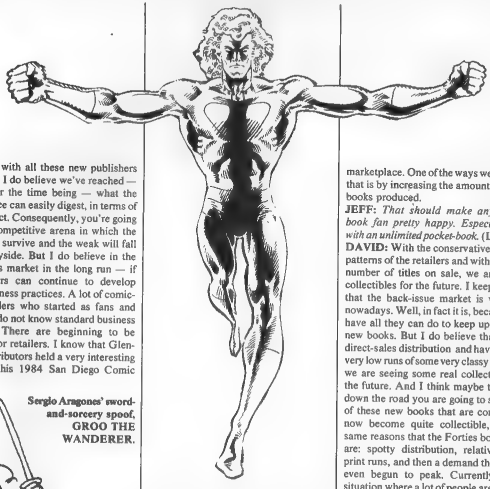

especially with all these new publishers entering it. I do believe we've reached — at least for the time being — what the marketplace can easily digest, in terms of new product. Consequently, you're going to see a competitive arena in which the strong will survive and the weak will fall by the wayside. But I do believe in the direct-sales market in the long run — if the retailers can continue to develop sound business practices. A lot of comic-book retailers who started as fans and collectors do not know standard business practices. There are beginning to be seminars for retailers. I know that Glenwood Distributors held a very interesting one, and this 1984 San Diego Comic Convention is planning the first of what is hoped to be an annual two-day show for the trade only, discussing things like budgeting and advertising, just a basic seminar on good business practices. I think if the market can respond to this kind of training, it can expand into areas such as shopping malls, and then the outlets will grow in number and the general public will begin to patronize these stores more and more. The direct-sales marketplace is viable and growing. It's just not growing fast enough to keep up with the amount of product we're seeing now.

Sergio Aragones' sword-and-sorcery spoof, GROO THE WANDERER.

JEFF: *Obviously, then, your commitment to the future is to keep exploring the farthest parameters of that marketplace.*

DAVID: Well, yes, and also to remain a strong and ever-growing presence in that marketplace. One of the ways we're doing that is by increasing the amount of comic books produced.

JEFF: *That should make any comic-book fan pretty happy. Especially one with an unlimited pocket-book.* (Laughter.)

DAVID: With the conservative ordering patterns of the retailers and with the large number of titles on sale, we are seeing collectibles for the future. I keep hearing that the back-issue market is very soft nowadays. Well, in fact it is, because fans have all they can do to keep up with the new books. But I do believe that by the direct-sales distribution and having some very low runs of some very classy material, we are seeing some real collectibles for the future. And I think maybe ten years down the road you are going to see some of these new books that are coming out now become quite collectible, for the same reasons that the Forties books now are: spotty distribution, relatively low print runs, and then a demand that hasn't even begun to peak. Currently, it's a situation where a lot of people are trying a lot of different things in a lot of different marketplaces. It's a very innovative time. It appears to be very much like stories I heard of the Forties, where people were experimenting with all kinds of different formats. I've heard **Jack Kirby** say that the only reason they didn't do comic books in the shape of circles and triangles was oversight. Right now we have a brand new marketplace, and it's feeling its way along.

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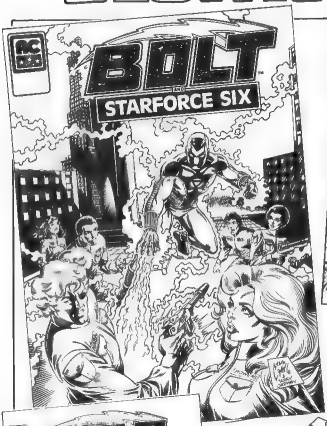
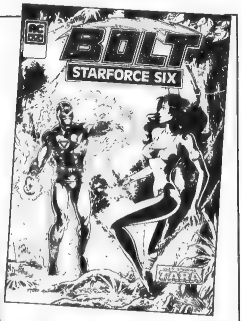
WILL BOLT SAVE THE WORLD...OR DESTROY IT?





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"I made a practice of not dating fans."

MELONEY CRAWFORD

Super-heroes often walk a thin line between legality and outlawry. Acting without official authorization, they break into private property, beat people up, and — on rare occasions — kill. Police departments generally take a dim view of such "vigilantism." Some super-heroes (such as Spider-Man, earlier in his career) have been wanted by the law, and at least one super-hero (The Flash) recently spent time behind bars. Should Spidey, Flash or any of their costumed colleagues run afoul of the authorities in the future, they might seek the help of Philadelphia lawyer Meloney Crawford. An ardent, active and articulate fan of comic books, Meloney shared with us her views on lawyers and women in comics and fandom . . .

BILL CHADWICK: *Do you find it unusual to be a female fan of comics?*

MELONEY CRAWFORD: I did when I first started going to conventions. All the fan friends I hung around with at conventions were male, because there weren't that many women attending. It was not uncommon for people to assume I was somebody's girlfriend or wife — which, at the time, I used to find pretty insulting, because I made it a practice of not dating my fan friends. Why complicate what was pleasant and quasi-familial? Eventually I broke that rule, and now I'm not insulted when people assume that I am along as somebody's wife. Now I *am* somebody's wife.

BILL: *Did you meet your husband at a comics convention?*

MELONEY: Yes, I did. When I break a rule, I break it in a big way. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *Do you find there are more women attending comics conventions now?*

MELONEY: Yes. I think that's directly attributable to the fact that there's a great variety of material available in comics. You have straight adventure stuff, like TEEN TITANS and ATARI FORCE, which I like, and on the other hand, more naturalistic or *avant garde* books like LOVE AND ROCKETS, which I also like. There's real freedom in comics today, in terms of format and content. Not only is it very exciting, but there's also more appeal to a greater number of people, including women. Comics are no longer — as one professional put it to me about ten years ago — "stories written by little boys for little boys."

BILL: *Did you like comics when you were a little girl?*

MELONEY: Yes, I started reading them when I was about three. I can't recall what was the first comic I read, but it was probably a Harvey comic — LITTLE DOT, LITTLE LOTTA, RICHIE RICH — because I remember I had a whole lot of them around the house. My mom thought they were Wholesome Reading, along with Little Golden Books.

BILL: *How did you get interested in super-hero comics?*

MELONEY: I used to visit my cousin Eddie, who was ten years older than me. I was about four at the time, and I started reading Eddie's super-hero comics. I soon realized that they were a lot more interesting than the Wholesome Reading Matter I had at home. Even the most interesting

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Meloney Crawford
Occupation: Attorney
Born: 25 January 1955 — Augusta, GA. I'm a relatively typical Aquarian, only I have Aries rising, so I'm a little more aggressive.
Hobbies: Comics, film, science-fiction, rock and folk music.
Favorite Comics (Past): LEGION OF SUPER HEROES, BLACK PANTHER, KILLRAVEN, LOIS LANE, WONDER WOMAN
Favorite Comics (Present): NEW TEEN TITANS, AMERICAN FLAGG, NEXUS, LOVE AND ROCKETS, ATARI FORCE
Favorite Artists: Dave Stevens, Craig Russell, Marshall Rogers
Favorite Writers: Frank Miller, The Hernandez Brothers, Steve Gerber, Alan Moore.
Pet Peeve: Fandom is no longer just a group of people linked by a shared love of comics. Nowadays, it's too often used as a springboard for the self-aggrandizement of certain semi-pro fans.

"In comics today there's freedom — in

comics I had at home — LITTLE LULU or DONALD DUCK — paled in comparison to SUPERMAN or BATMAN. My grandfather thought it was just fine that I liked SUPERMAN, which he considered real All-American, and I prevailed upon him to break the embargo on super-hero comics my mom had established at home. He'd buy super-hero cor ics for me.

BILL: *Did you develop any particular favorites?*

MELONEY: I liked the whole SUPERMAN family of comics, especially LOIS LANE. I think the **Kurt Schaffenberger** art on LOIS LANE was just great. I loved the early **Mort Weisinger** comics. When I was a small kid in upstate New York, the store where I would get my comics had them displayed on a clothesline over the soda fountain, so you really couldn't page through them. I had firsthand experience with "Uncle" Mort's marketing technique of putting a spectacular picture on the cover that was completely unrelated to the story inside. *(Laughter.)*

Later, when we moved to the suburbs, gran'dad and I would frequent the Rexall drugstore in the local shopping center. It displayed comics on a revolving wire rack. I felt that was a major innovation in comics sales. Imagine: I could *browse* through a comic before I decided if it was worth buying!

BILL: *You were lucky you had some adult support for reading comics.*

MELONEY: I was, but "scary" comics remained *verboten.* Whether a comic was classified as "scary" was determined by the presiding adult. If a comic cover featured haunted houses, ghouls or monsters, it would merit a shake of the adult head and the pronouncement, "I don't think you should read this — it looks like a Scary Comic to me."

BILL: *Did you ever get to read them?*

MELONEY: I had my big chance when I went with my grandparents on vacation to Louisville, Kentucky, and we stayed with friends, the **Coynes.** I noticed the **Coyne** kids had an ample stock of the notorious Scary Comics. At night, when I was bedded down in the spare room where the kids kept their comics, I snuck out of bed and selected a few choice Scary Comics to read by the dim light from the hallway. I believe they were issues of MY GREATEST ADVENTURE or somesuch, with lurid covers. I had fully anticipated discovering that all this business about Scary Comics was a lot of grown-up baloney. Imagine my surprise when they actually *were* scary! Unlike, say, the Bizarros — who *everybody* knew were Make Believe — these stories had a gnawing edge of reality to them. There was one of some hunters being turned to totem poles for tampering with ancient ruins. Another story had the whole Earth in peril, with the water supply unuseable — it had turned to ice, or some other weather-related weirdness. Who was to say that sort of thing *couldn't* happen? Little kids like me wouldn't stand a chance. I think my last fevered thought before I fell asleep was, "I wish I'd never read those Scary Comics."

BILL: *So you returned to the familiar world of super-heroes?*

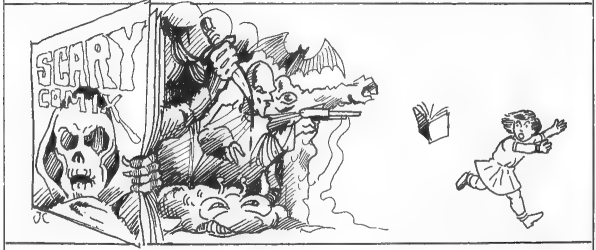
MELONEY: Yes. I found myself developing preference for group comics, like the JUSTICE LEAGUE and, especially, THE LEGION OF SUPER HEROES. The Legion seemed pretty neat — a bunch of kids going off to live by themselves without adult supervision. The Amazon society in WONDER WOMAN seemed even more interesting than the Legion setup. Unlike the girls in the Legion, nobody pushed those Amazons around. At the time, the boys in my neighborhood had formed a club — complete with a No-Girls-Allowed secret clubhouse — and routinely roughed up any girls who dared to even get close to their territory. So I formed an Amazon Society on my block. We spent our days working on our own hidden clubhouse, sharpening our "fighting skills" and reading WONDER WOMAN. Once we fed one of the boys plaster of paris, telling him it was whipped cream, just to see what would happen. He wasn't too smart, but he sure was resilient — he downed a fair amount of plaster with no ill effects.

BILL: *Did you ever read any Marvels when you were a kid?*

MELONEY: I started getting seriously involved with Marvel around the time of the move, when I was about eleven. I'd read an occasional issue of the FANTASTIC FOUR in the past — episodes featuring the Puppet Master, Dragon Man and the Infant Terrible come to mind — but I hadn't become a great **Marvel** fan. My initial reaction to Marvels was that they seemed rough compared to the polished, rather mannered dramas that DC published at the time. By the late Sixties, however, my tastes took a turnaround. I thought Marvel Comics were the greatest thing on Earth. I adored the **Romita,** Sr., issues of SPIDER-MAN. Looking back, I think the move from **Kurt Schaffenberger** to **John Romita** was not all that great of a stylistic leap.

BILL: *Was this an interest you shared with your friends?*

MELONEY: No, I just didn't seem to be able to interest them in comics. They



Art: Jim Chadwick

format and content — that's very exciting."

TEEN TITANS' Starfire and Wonder Girl. Words by Wolfman, art by Perez and Giordano.

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were more interested in SIXTEEN magazine than SPIDER-MAN. I used to write stories that would star my favorite Marvel heroes, like Spider-Man —

BILL: *I'm sure the copyright division of Marvel's legal department would have been interested in that. (Laughter.)*

MELONEY: — and feature my friends in supporting roles. My friends were always interested in what I wrote, but I never made the connection that it was because *they* were in the stories. They *weren't* in Marvel Comics, so I could never interest them in the actual comics. I began to have second thoughts about my hobby, and lost interest in comics around the age of thirteen. I became interested in Real Books, mostly science-fiction and fantasy — **Asmiov, Bradbury, Tolkien,** and **Heinlein.** And then I switched schools, where I met a lot of kids who liked the same things I liked, and they also liked comic books. I got from them a kind of social re-enforcement that it was okay to be a "grown-up" kid and like comics, too. These kids were deeply into comics — they were really interested in comic books as an art form. I not only became interested in comics again, but became an active fan — subscribing to fanzines, attending my first conventions, writing letters to comics, that sort of thing. I never equalled the volume of well-known Marvel letterhacks like **Dean Mullaney** or **Ralph Macchio,** but I had a number of letters printed, and my name began to be recognized by some folks.

BILL: *Did you enter any of the costume contests at conventions?*

MELONEY: Yes. In fact, once I was at a STAR TREK convention dressed as Isis, the Red Witch from **Roger Zelazny's** CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS, and made it into the semi-final costume parade. As I made my tour of the ballroom, I became aware of someone trotting alongside me, making noise. I assumed it just some wise-guy and paid no attention until he started calling me by my full name. I stopped and looked around. There was a short guy with sandy hair and a reddish beard and he looked like he'd just run the marathon. He had a briefcase in one hand and extended the other. It was **Don McGregor.** He had heard some people calling my name and had recognized it from the letters pages, and we had talked on the telephone once, so he'd decided to introduce himself. He thought I looked like Volcana Ash from KILL-RAVEN. At a later convention I *did* appear in the costume parade as Volcana Ash, as a surprise for Don and **Craig Russell. Rich Bruning,** who's one of the

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Dart, ATARI FORCE's resourceful heroine. "Some comics, like TEEN TITANS and ATARI FORCE, present very positive images of women." Art by Garcia Lopez and Ricardo Villagran.

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FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

"Within fandom people have tunnel vision."

best friends I've made through fandom, helped me put it together. I was in the Ladies' Room at the hotel trying to check if I had applied the red makeup evenly on my back, and a little old lady tottered in and went into shock at the sight of me. I explained, "It's a skin condition." *(Laughter.)* She went off in a hurry — presumably to find other facilities.

BILL: *You mentioned that you had a policy of dating only non-fans. Did this present any problems?*

MELONEY: Some. Most people become disenchanted with comics at the age of twelve, and it was hard for me to explain to them why I remained interested in such a hobby. I tried to interest some of the guys I was dating in comics, usually with less than spectacular results. But that was nothing compared to explaining that I would be going off with a bunch of guys to a comic convention, and be innocently sharing sleeping quarters with them!

BILL: *Do your fellow attorneys know that you're a comic-book fan?*

MELONEY: I generally don't let them know about it, although I had an interesting situation a few years ago when I had a Christmas party. A large proportion of the friends I invited were attorneys. At the time I had my collection of comics in the living room — stacks and stacks of them. One of my attorney friends asked kind of nonchalantly, "Gee, you sure have a lot of comic books, don't you?" I said, "Oh, yeah — and my roommate has the entire Marvel set." This guy, who was a very serious type, got sort of glassy-eyed, and said, "Marvel Comics, *really?* I used to read them all the time when I was a kid! Tell me, do they still publish X-MEN?" And we ended up in a forty-five-minute conversation in which I updated him on what was going on in the X-MEN, and differences between the old X-MEN and the new X-MEN. It was kind of funny. But I've found a large number of attorneys who are in fandom, including **Rich Morrisey**, who's a fairly well-known fan. I'm currently the co-C.M. (Central Mailer) of Kappa APA, which is the oldest APA around, and there are about four attorneys in that.

BILL: *Could you explain what an APA is?*

MELONEY: An APA (Amateur Press Association) is an organization of fans who send in contributions — stories, articles, art work — to a central mailer, who puts each contribution together in an anthology and in turn mails out this collated set to each member. There are APAs about science-fiction, APAs about politics, or APAs dealing with one particular character or series — INTERLAC is just about the Legion of Super Heroes, for example. I understand there's even an APA about sex, but I don't belong to that.

BILL: *Well, if you find out what their address is, please pass it along.* (Laughter.) *Do you read the column by your fellow attorney, Robert Ingersoll, in BUYER'S GUIDE?*

MELONEY: I only read his column once, and I did agree with a number of things he said. But I think the abundant inaccuracies concerning the legal profession and the legal process in comics are probably no more numerous in comics than they are in films or television, so I will tend to ignore them.

BILL: *Does your being an attorney impress your fellow fans?*

MELONEY: Within fandom people have a kind of tunnel vision so that being an attorney isn't that important. I find it kind of amusing. A lot of my friends from when I first became involved in fandom — **Ralph Macchio, Mark Gruenwald, Peter Gillis** — are now involved in comics professionally — living Everyfan's dream, so to speak. The reaction I get is, "Oh, you're an attorney — so what?" If I worked for Marvel, *then* they'd be impressed.

BILL: *What about the portrayal of women in comics?*

MELONEY: I guess it's safe to say that I'm a bit of a feminist, and there are some things in comics that kind of tire me out, especially when it comes to manipulating women. I'm talking about comics that exploit women but seem to say that they're not. One example that comes to mind is the She-Hulk, more in her present incarnation. This is supposedly an educated woman — and a lawyer, to boot! — but she prefers to run around as a giant green nymphomaniac! *(Laughter.)* But some comics, like TEEN TITANS and ATARI FORCE, present very positive images of women — which I think have always been there in comics if you've been willing to look for them. As much as Lois Lane was always trying these goofy stunts to get Superman's attention, she was a pretty scrappy individual and was willing to do just about anything to get a story. Maybe it's true that "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

CHRISTY MARX & WENDY PINI — ODD?

Dear Dave:

In your seventh issue, **Dwight Decker** had an interesting letter to which I'd like to respond. Dwight had found the use by **Wendy Pini** of the word "participate" to describe **Christy Marx's** involvement in comics as "odd." He felt that "comics are more **Darwin** than **Marquis of Queensbury**."

I read Dwight's comments not long after reading an article about a study being conducted by a scientist in New York State on the values of world-views that American boys and girls are taught as they grow up. The findings showed boys tend to grow up with the concept of being an individual acting on the forces around him and thus a man's value comes from having an individual effect on the world, while girls tend to grow up with the concept of being part of a group of people and thus a woman's value comes from the strength of her relationships. A telling observation supporting these findings was that men's greatest fears were of being overwhelmed, while women's fears were of being alone.

Think about it: in American popular culture, traditionally it's been the boys and men who read the superheroes and watch the cop shows while it's the girls and women who read the romances and watch the soap operas. Science fiction was almost an exclusively male domain for decades until the late '60s and '70s came along and the stories started dealing with people as well as hardware and adventure.

I think the same thing is happening in comics today. More and more girls and women are reading X-MEN and TEEN TITANS because of the increased focus on personal relationships in those series. The wonderful achievement of ELFQUEST is the artful combination of imaginative adventure and an absorbing range of personal relationships the breadth of which are rarely seen in comics (between men and men, women and men, women and women, and very significantly, between children and adults). It's no surprise it's a favorite of male and female alike.

The commercial success of Wendy and Richard is not a Darwinian conquest of opposing comics series but rather an expansion of the field by their contribution of so much of themselves and their personal insights into their work.

So I don't find it "odd" at all to talk about **Christy Marx's** "participation" in comics. Wendy's a smarter, better person for seeing life in this way and it certainly has been a major factor in her success.

As the agent for **Christy Marx** for her upcoming SISTERHOOD OF STEEL (Epic Comics) and CARLOS McLLYR (ECLIPSE MONTHLY) series, I see my role as helping her to create and improve her relationships with her artist-partners, her editors and publishers, and hopefully with her readers. The more we *all* participate in the process the better we all will be. It's by working together, creators and readers, pros and fans, that we'll have better comics and a better time reading them.

Mike Friedrich
Star★Reach Productions
P.O. Box 2328
Berkeley, CA 94702

THE RIGHT STUFF!

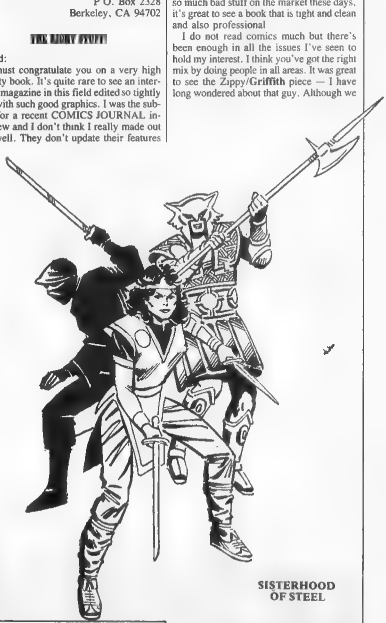
David:

I must congratulate you on a very high quality book. It's quite rare to see an interview magazine in this field edited so tightly and with such good graphics. I was the subject for a recent COMICS JOURNAL interview and I don't think I really made out too well. They don't update their features (it took over a year to get to print) and they aren't too interested in getting art from the subject — or, at least, that seemed to be the case with me

I have written to and spoken with the folks behind D'ARC TANGENT and your interview was great. I was saddened to hear that they didn't know about the future of the book in a recent BUYER'S GUIDE. It seemed like a real original piece of work.

I really do enjoy your magazine — there's so much bad stuff on the market these days, it's great to see a book that is tight and clean and also professional

I do not read comics much but there's been enough in all the issues I've seen to hold my interest. I think you've got the right mix by doing people in all areas. It was great to see the Zapp/**Griffith** piece — I have long wondered about that guy. Although we



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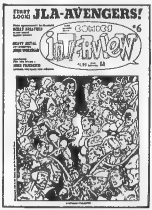

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share the same distributor, Last Gasp, and I have been part of that Underground scene, Bill and I have never met . . . until COMICS INTERVIEW. He had a lot of truly good insights on the field.

Phil Yeh
Fragments West
3908 East Fourth Street
Long Beach, CA 90814

NEGLECT STUDIES? NEVER!

Dear Dave and Bill,

In the process of being edited, some of what I said in my interview was somewhat removed from context. On the other hand, my syntax pattern seemed a little more literate in print than I think I usually use out loud. I hope that folks will allow for that. Overall, you did a nice job.

However, I was *never* asked if my studies suffered due to my passion for comicology. What I told **Jim Salicrup** was that moving from country to country twice in a short space of my adolescence made it very difficult for me to maintain my average. I implied that comics and collecting helped me get through this difficult time in my life.

The point I want to make is that no one out there should get the idea to neglect his or her studies in favor of comics, or any other diversion, for that matter. I toed the mark all through school. I *literally* was raised to be a gentleman and a scholar; and in my limited way, I've always tried to continue in the spirit of that upbringing.

As a guy who graduated college with an honors degree in art, creative writing, and a full exposure to academic subjects, let me stress to everyone that my career has been difficult enough with these qualifications. While I must admit that my career has come to me through comicology, I wouldn't suggest that students should approach classes with anything less than all the attention they can muster. *Without* education, forget it!

As an aside, I thought that some of my accomplishments may have been somewhat overestimated. I hope that fellow comicologists will get something worthwhile out of it all, and will feel welcome to get in touch about the interview, my MARVEL AGE articles, and so on.

Thanks very much for your generous mag space. It's wonderful to experience such interest in the Chamber of Fantasy Collection and my life. I extend the same good feelings to all of you.

Warren Reece
2270 Plumb 1st Street
Brooklyn, NY 11229

PS—My local comics pusher hasn't been selling fixes of COMICS INTERVIEW regularly — although, with the publication of the thing about me, he seems to have altered his policy!

I apologize for the misinterpretation of what you said to Jim Salicrup, in the interview, about your education. Sometimes, listening to tapes of other people's conversations, it's possible to pick up the wrong nuances in tones of voice or mis-hear a word or two, and draw the wrong conclusions about what was being expressed by the people you are listening to.

In any event, I'm sorry if the published interview made you seem lackadaisical about your studies. Dave and I think your message to our younger readers, to not let comics interfere with their studies, is an important one.

Thanks for your support and for inducing your local retailer to carry the magazine on a regular basis. If you can work your magic over other retailers you visit, please feel free to do so!

—Bill Chadwick

HELP STAMP OUT SUPERMAN!

To My Fellow Comic-Book Fans,

As most of you know, 1988 marks the 50th anniversary of the creation of Superman. Whether you are a fan of his or not, one thing remains true: If it wasn't for the publication of ACTION #1 in June, 1938, there would most likely be no comic fandom today! Not only was the comic industry

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revolutionized by this, but Superman's influence can be seen in almost every American hero in fiction since then. He also is one of the world's most recognized characters (along with Mickey Mouse and a few others). For these reasons I'd like to see his anniversary commemorated.

To me, at least, a very simple and very fitting tribute would be for the US Postal Service to issue a commemorative stamp in 1988 honoring Superman.

To achieve this, I have taken it upon myself to have a petition printed, requesting that such a stamp be issued, and am currently distributing it and plan to submit it to the proper authorities early next year.

I will gladly make copies of this petition available to any comic store owner, fan, or anyone else for that matter, who wishes to take part in this effort. All I ask in return is that the signed petitions be returned to me.

This request is not entirely an ego trip, although, to be perfectly honest with you and myself, that is a small part of it. The main reasons are quite simple.

1. Superman has been my #1 hero for over 25 years. As a result this stamp has deep personal meaning.

2. As the cost of printing, copying, postage, etc., is coming out of my pocket, I just want to make sure that all the petitions get submitted, and to the proper authorities.

As I said before, I will send the forms to anyone who writes me. Just send me your name, address, and how many petitions you'll need (each holds 25 signatures). I'll get them to you as soon as possible.

Alan Carr
Box 8831
Madison, WI 53708

OLD TIMERS ARE TOPS

Dear David,

I enjoy COMICS INTERVIEW a lot, and your God-Size Issue #9 was no exception. Some of my favorite pieces are with the old timers in the industry. I delighted in the story of **Joe Kubert**'s early days . . . I guess he's not one of the super vets, but he's been around. Some of the interviews are inane and superficial — this I enjoy also!

Your layout and visual presentation is quite snappy. Keep it coming.

Steve Lafler
Cat-Head Comics
2150 NW Northrup
Portland, OR 97210

Bill and I both got a laugh out of the copy of DOG BOY comics you sent along, Steve — especially seeing as how we've experienced similar schizoid, caffeine-induced states while trying to make deadlines after drinking a pot or three of coffee!

—DAK

SIMONSON'S THOR

WALT SIMONSON, the man and his art, covered in *two* titanic talkfests — grand master JOE KUBERT gabs — a walk down memory lane with comics giant GARDNER FOX — much, *much* more!!

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NEXT ISSUE: In his first interview ever, *Jose Luis Garcia Lopez* speaks out about his much-acclaimed art — and about what's wrong with US. comics! Unpredictable *Alan Moore* wittily dissects superheroes and his own SWAMP THING scripting! *Jack Davis*, MAD and EC Comics veteran, talks about cartooning his way to the top! And, as a special added treat, TV's *Mister Rogers* shares his views on superheroes! Plus a striking ATARI FORCE cover by *Garcia Lopez*! Be here for all this and more in COMICS INTERVIEW #12!

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